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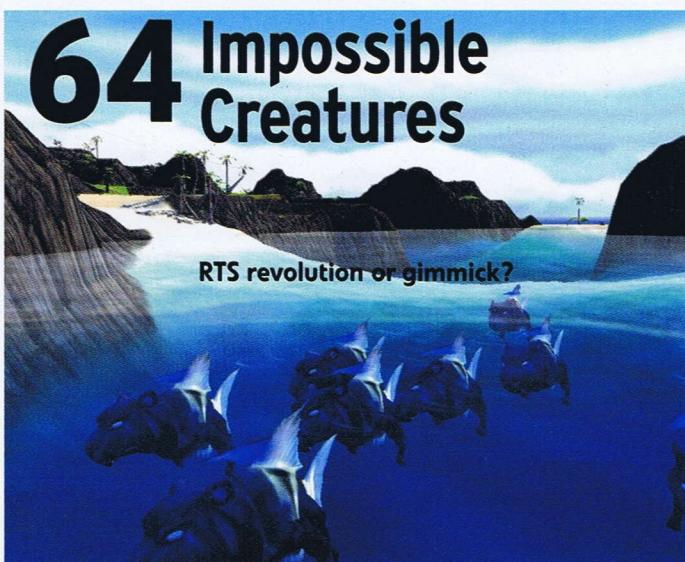
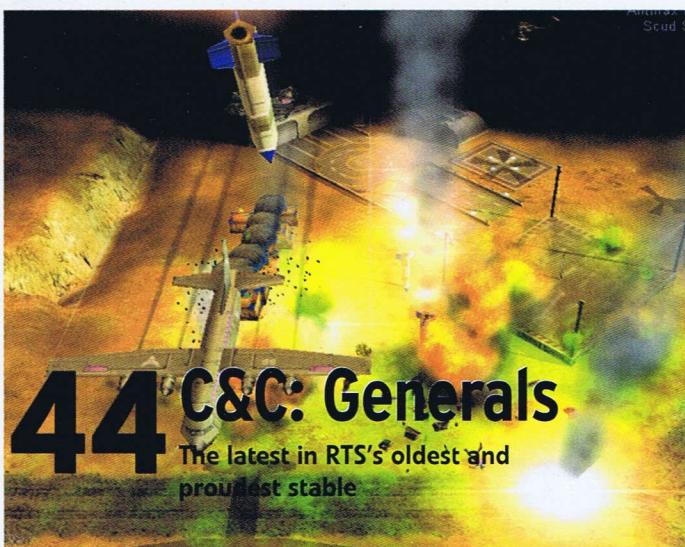
Has large-scale military strategy EVER looked this good?



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Too much goodness for any sane person to handle



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Forget about Yahoo, the real question is do you Google? Google is fast becoming the premiere search engine online, thanks to its lean interface and collection of genuinely useful tools. Google is a refreshingly atypical company in that they will periodically improve the usefulness of their service, without charging its users extra. If only our broadband ISPs could be like that...

Anyway the point of mentioning Google at all is that the search engine

has recently added what it calls the 2002 Year-End Google Zeitgeist to its press centre. You can find it at www.google.com/press/zeitgeist, but before you rush off on a whim, let me explain what this thing is. Zeitgeist is a buzzword for describing what a society is thinking about, it describes what we're interested in, what we think is important, what worries us, what makes us angry - in short, it's the attitude of a culture.

Defining a Zeitgeist is always tricky since we know there's a big difference between how people act as a mass versus how they act as individuals. You can predict buying patterns in a given Coles supermarket, but it's a lot harder to predict what Mrs Smith will buy for dinner on any given Tuesday, unless you spend a lot of time and money observing her as an individual. And when you start wanting to observe a significant number of people, the time and effort required to monitor them individually becomes prohibitive.

But how about an online search engine? This is the perfect medium for gathering data on individuals. By logging search queries, Google has been able to collect a bunch of information that has the potential to make them millions, once they sell it to the relevant people. The information tells us what people are thinking about, what brands and music they are interested in, and which current events they think are important enough to warrant a search for further details.

For instance, the 2002 Zeitgeist has collated a Top 10 Brands of 2002. The number one brand, measured on the basis of numbers of individual folks searching for it, is Ferrari. Number 2 is Sony. Man of the Year, as far as Internet searches are concerned, is Eminem. The Woman of the Year is Jennifer Lopez.

The Zeitgeist doesn't just measure top queries, it also measures top declining queries. That is, popular search terms that have suddenly dropped

away in significance. Number 1 is Nostradamus, but more interestingly number 2 is Napster.

Of immediate relevance to PC PowerPlay readers, the Top 10 videogames in 2002 according to Google are all PC games. Number 1 is The Sims, number 2 is Counter-Strike, number 3 is GTA3 (okay, this may have been searched by PS2 users as well). It's interesting to see that Jedi Outcast outranks Diablo 2, and that Max Payne - a game we thought had had its day in the sun - still makes it in at number 8.

While the Top 10 lists are interesting and have a few surprises (IKEA is apparently the top retailer globally) it's what we can perhaps infer from the nature of the Top 10s that is really useful, as it can tell us a lot about the kind of people who are starting to use more advanced Internet tools - like Google.

The fact that most of the Top 10 music groups and performers are artists you'd primarily associate with young folk - Shakira, 2Pac, Eminem, Nelly, Linkin Park, Ja Rule (with Metallica sneaking in at number 10) - especially when compared to the 2001 Zeitgeist which had the Beatles and U2 at numbers 1 and 2 respectively, perhaps indicates that 'ordinary' teens are starting to get quite Net savvy.

Instead of being the domain of nerds-in-the-know and IT professionals, Google is clearly starting to be used by a much more mainstream audience. Why do I care? Because Google has never been part of the Quick-Fix-IPO mentality of the other search engines, particularly the likes of Yahoo.

The search engine is your gateway to the Internet, and in many ways it defines the kind of Net user you are, which in turn defines the kind of PC user you are. And it's good to see ordinary folks getting to grips with their machines and starting to use the Net as a familiar tool, not as some crazy new novelty that's an alternative to doing schoolwork or study.

And how about those Top 10 games huh? PC is still king, as least as far as cyberspace is concerned. Here's to further PC dominance in 2003!

Anthony Fordham
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Top Television Shows 2002

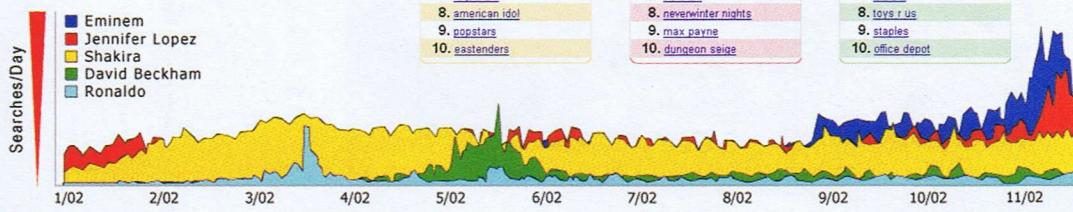
1. [the simpsons](#)
2. [big brother](#)
3. [osbourne](#)
4. [south park](#)
5. [spongebob](#)
6. [anna nicole smith](#)
7. [sopranos](#)
8. [american idol](#)
9. [popstars](#)
10. [eastenders](#)

Top Video Games 2002

1. [the sims](#)
2. [counter strike](#)
3. [gta 3](#)
4. [warcraft 3](#)
5. [jedi knight 2](#)
6. [morrowind](#)
7. [diablo 2](#)
8. [neverwinter nights](#)
9. [max payne](#)
10. [dungeon siege](#)

Top Retailers 2002

1. [ikea](#)
2. [home depot](#)
3. [walmart](#)
4. [best buy](#)
5. [sears](#)
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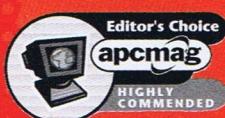
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LETTER OF THE MONTH: Proud to be an old gamer

After watching my grandchildren play sophisticated games with amazing graphics I became disenchanted with my set up which struggles to keep the original Doom running. The final straw came when my great-grandson loaded his teaching CD and told me the pictures were funny and it thinks too long. So I bought a new machine and shot ahead in the operating system stakes with Windows XP.

The first software was no problem: Microsoft Flight Sim 2002, (well what did you expect) however before investing further I bought your magazine PC PowerPlay issue 80 and found that I needed to upgrade my cerebral cortex and acquire an additional index finger to play some of the games. Then I realised that my machine came equipped with a DVD drive, so maybe I could out-graphic the Xbox, Playstation, etc, so I crawled back to the newsagent and bought DVD PowerPlay issue 81, then spent the next hour trying to figure out where the DVD demos were. Do any PC

games actually run as DVD games or is it just being used to avoid multiple CDs? Perhaps the rush of technology to my brain made me imagine things that have yet to be and I need another seventy-four years before they arrive.

The Old Codger

Ah yes OC - if I may call you OC - I suspect your error is a lot more common than younger, supposedly hipper PC users would dare admit. The DVD is of course nothing more than a storage medium, and does indeed let us pack more stuff on a single disc than a CD, about seven times more in fact. But kudos to having a great-grandson and reading PCPP, if nothing else you provide vital and reassuring proof that gamers can survive the rigours of real life and live to a ripe old age. Although, I guess you were somewhat protected in your earlier gaming years by being forced to take vital time out while you ran the punch cards through your rusting ENIAC down at the local

Polytechnic. That tic-tac-toe sure had some swanky graphics, huh?

We at PCPP always love hearing from our more mature readers, particularly because its refreshing to have people asking questions that everyone has, but most are still too young and insecure to dare asking. It seems perfectly logical to me that since movie DVDs look far better than VHS, a game distributed on DVD should therefore also look a lot better than one distributed on CD.

Anyway, here's to the future OC, a future of older gamers, and here's trusting you'll stay with us for a good many years yet, or at least long enough to enjoy a few runs through Doom 3.

What old gamers say:

Well, I don't know about DVD, it sounds complicated, can I run my databases on it?

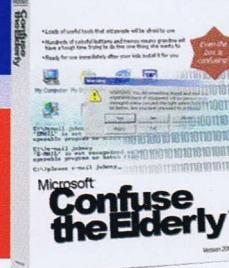


What they really mean:

die campzor wallhack
cheatbot llama f4got!!!
i killed U dood U R
llama!!!



Microsoft



Ironstorm review out-of-step

After reading your review of Ironstorm, I went online for a look at some second opinions on the game. My first stop was Gamespot. They gave it an overall score of 7 and they said "Its story doesn't make a whole lot of sense, and it's sometimes frustratingly difficult, but Ironstorm is a reasonably successful action game, which is what counts." I also took a look at their reader reviews - pure flames. Next stop, MobyGames, "Ironstorm could be a good game - if there were experienced designers! The good story and intensive atmosphere are quite impressive, but the bad graphics, the repetitive gameplay and the crappy multiplayer-part leave a bad feeling about this game."



In recognition of many years service to gaming, Old Codger wins a copy of Return to Castle Wolfenstein, which doesn't come on DVD, but will look plenty swanky on his new PC. Don't let the great-grandson watch though: Nazi flesh-eating zombies = nightmares and thousands of dollars in therapy.

I then went to a hand-full of other sites, which again didn't praise the game, none said it was crap, but it was nothing to write home about. So please explain, why 96%? Does everyone in the office feel the same way about this game or was Anthony Fordham given a 'generous' amount of cash from 4X Studios/Take 2? Most of your other reviews tend to be very accurate with other [online] opinions.

Awesome

See about sixteen different threads on the PCPP forums for more discussion on this, but I guess at this point all I can say is that I've been fairly disappointed with the way Ironstorm was reviewed online. That the game is better than RTCW can hardly be called into question, that it's more frenetic and more of a 'classic' shooter experience than Medal of Honour should also seem obvious. These online reviews seem to criticise Ironstorm for many factors which are either overlooked or bizarrely seen as plusses in other more major titles. Perhaps Ironstorm represented an opportunity for these journalists to slag off a genre they saw as lacking, without fearing any sort of response from a major publisher. What is Ironstorm's true fault, that it like all other shooters is linear and has only a small set of repeating tasks for player to engage in, or that it doesn't come from id, Epic or Electronic Arts?

Wants time machine

Gaming as it seems, has developed in leaps and bounds. Gameplay ideas, stories, characters you love or hate, graphics, sound, etc. I enjoy every game I play (except Supercar Street Challenge...) and wait in anticipation for the next hit. A simple question, for the sake of what might be to come. What might we be expecting to see reviewed in issue #150 of PCPP?

Necron

Duke Nukem Forever, hahaha. Actually, probably not. Seriously though, if we don't have cinematic, photorealistic graphics, 14-

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STUART BAIRD

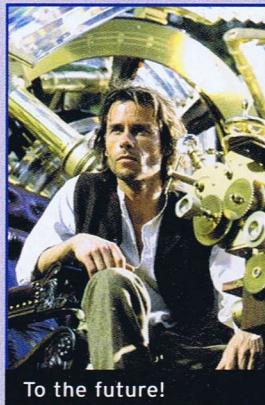


StarTrek.com



COMING SOON TO CINEMAS

point surround sound and a VR system that's comfortable and effective on an \$1800 machine by April 2007, then I for one will seriously begin considering taking up golf, and leaving this gaming caper for the birds.



To the future!

Is an LCD

I have been subscribing for about two years and that is about the time I got my computer. It wasn't the best computer back then but it sure could support the latest games (Deus Ex, Ground Control etc). I call this time the golden age of gaming. Since then I believe gaming has gone downhill. The release of Unreal Tournament 2003 is really no better than the original Unreal Tournament. Why do these big time developers spend so much money and time on new graphics when all it really gets them is a few fans who have expensive computers and can actually play those games. I have played all the latest games at friends houses but I still prefer the older games. I enjoy playing GTA2 better than GTA3. I mean sure, GTA3 is more graphical but

nothing is more fun than sitting next to water in a tank and watching special forces cars fly into the drink. Why can't Developers respect those with less expensive computers and make a few low quality games.

Patrick Neff

It's the great divide - on the one hand we have the vast unwashed masses with their TNT2 and ATI Rage video chipsets, and on the other we have the 22 year old graduate lawyer with a P4 3.06GHz running a Radeon 9700. Both these very different groups need to have their gaming appetites satisfied, or as the media well knows, they'll go on mad rampages through our local pedestrian precincts. Many developers ignore the great divide and just do whatever they want. Others try and meet it in the middle; games that look damn good but will run on more modest machines. Unfortunately this rarely works: the Radeon 9700 owners will wail at the lack of DirectX 8.1 bells and whistles, and TNT2 owners will wail at the lack of framerate. What we really need is a universal 3D engine that is properly and intelligently scaleable, that will run beautifully on SLI

Voodoo2s and GeForce4 Ti4600s alike. When this engine becomes the standard, developers will be able to focus all their time and energy on creating fresh and original gameplay concepts, like back in the good old days of the Amiga, the C64 and the Atari. The technological elitism of id and Epic will be broken, games will sell more copies and get cheaper, and art pundits on SBS will really sit up and take notice of our hobby. Then I woke up and it was all a dream.

PC dealers wiped his HDD

About a month ago I decided that I was going to get some upgrades from COMPUTER WORLD at Glen Waverly for my PC, I bought a 256 stick of RAM and a new 40G hard drive because I'd maxed out my old 40G that was the easy part. I know very little about installing new hardware so I didn't want to stuff up my PC so I got the Shop to do it, when I went back later that day to pickup my PC the guy told me he didn't have his boot disk so he couldn't format the new drive, he told me what to do when I got home.



He didn't even do a Crash-test. Dummy.

Anyway I tried to do what he told me to no avail so I took my PC back a few days later because the guy told me if I couldn't do it bring it back in and he'll fix it for me. Of course when I went back the guy who first installed my HD wasn't there but another guy agreed to do it for me so I left it with them.

Anyway I got my PC back home and I found that the guy had wiped my original HDD with my system installed on it! I was so pissed I rang them back up and blasted them saying you wiped out my entire system I had about 30GB of Data!

They weren't prepared to do diddy squat about it, the long and the short of it is I should've backup my files but thanks to the company's incompetence I lost all my files and they were prepared to do nothing about it, so I won't be going back to them again. I have only just recently gotten my files back but I'm still missing some things. Anyway I just want to over-emphasize the fact that we must backup our files because you never know what's going to happen.

Ben Breese

Of course you're 100% right Ben, back up should be a regular and planned part of your day-to-day PC usage, like flossing, prostate examinations for the over 30, and tax returns. Sadly though, even the most diligent backer-up (or is that backuper?) will at least once in their life experience that particular sinking feeling when, even as you place the CD into your CD-RW for the backup, your system freezes with that horrible grinding sound that can only mean a

fatal HDD head crash. All this said, it still barely excuses the computer company in question for their dodgy performance. Careful examination of fine print on just about all documents provided by companies such as this does reveal the "we are not responsible for wiping your HDD or the state of any of your data, unless we find child porn in which case we'll report you to the cops" clause, but honestly, the installation of an entirely separate physical drive should pose no risk whatsoever to any of your data. A computer store should have staff at a sufficient skill level to be able to install a new PARTITION on your old drive without any risk to your data, and at the very least these clowns should have copies of Norton Ghost or other drive imaging software so that if the unthinkable should happen, they can restore a customer's data with the flick of a switch.

My advice? Find a wirehead friend and get yourself educated, because these things are not hard to do once you get your head around the basic design philosophy (or should I say, hotchpotch of dumb ideas) of the modern PC. Because remember, if you want something done properly, you should do it yourself.



OF COURSE YOU CAN TRUST HIM, HE'S A COMPUTER SALESMAN

FROM THE FORUMS

Definitive Quake3-killer or over-engineered knockoff?
The usual suspects weigh in on this important debate. Join us at www.pcpowerplay.com.au/forums

Date Posted:
Dec/03/2002 1:18 pm††
UT2003. Is it just me or does it suck?
Well basically I think it lacked anything in the revolutionary department! I mean good game still but I got bored of the same old thing very quickly. The graphics are good but they

are so good it makes the game restrictive - you need a big rig! I have a medium rig, so I can run it fairly easily because of my GeForce4 but I still hate it! Just me though, what do you think?

Shinji_Ikari, Tiefling

Date Posted:
Dec/03/2002 1:23 pm††
Get ready for the deluge of hate mail!

Veefy, Avatar

Date Posted:
Dec/03/2002 1:37 pm††
I enjoy the game.
I really enjoyed UT for its multiplayer aspect and

UT2003 makes the game so much better than the original. I think that the one gripe that I do have with the game is that they took away the sniper rifle and chuck in some crappy lightning sniper...

XzadxWiley, Skaarj

Date Posted:
Dec/03/2002 2:40 pm††
Same old, same old. Good for a lark, then quickly got boring. It might have been better if they hadn't replaced those Assault missions with that shitty football thing.

Shai'tan, Tiefling

Date Posted:
Dec/03/2002 5:12 pm††
I like the game more than UT. I prefer the lightning sniper, because you get to see where the shot was fired from. I think they should've kept Assault instead of Bombing Ass Run. From what I've played, there are only a few stand out levels, while all the rest are mediocre, quite like the original UT. Quake 3 still reigns supreme as it runs better, smoother faster gameplay, and all the levels (just about) shine with brilliance.

Mic Joe, Guardian

Date Posted:
Dec/03/2002 9:03 pm††
Well, I have UT and UT2003 and thought the original was a great game, but UT2003 is basically the same old stuff, but what do you expect from a sequel? And, also they should have had an entirely new line up of weapons instead of remaking the old ones, and original UT had packs more levels, I mean, WTF UT2003 takes up about 3GB and its a sequel but it's smaller than UT!

hotlead, Peon

IRONSTORM



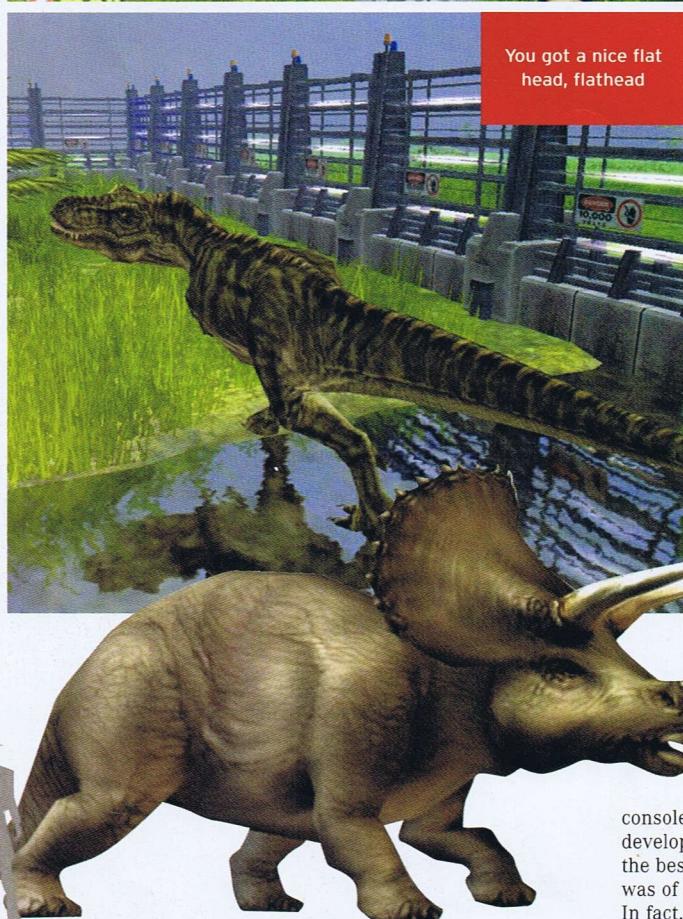
1964
THE FIRST WORLD WAR IS STILL RAGING...
ONLY YOU CAN END IT!



Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis

Developer: Bluetongue ■ Publisher: Vivendi ■ Distributor: Vivendi ■ Due: March 2003

It's not a crap movie knock off... wait, come back!



Jurassic Park has always been ripe for a game conversion, and indeed several studios have tackled the job with varying results. From the generic-to-the-point-of-tears Gameboy Advance platform version of The Lost World, to the occasional PlayStation attempts, even all the way back to an uninspired but inoffensive Jurassic Park on the SNES, Amblin Entertainment's most successful film franchise ever has consistently failed to translate into games worthy of our superior platform.

Undeterred by the track record, Australian developer BlueTongue is well on the way to delivering a new Jurassic Park game that actually seems to be the result of a bunch of people sitting down and thinking about what opportunities such a license would give for a game design.

Theme Sauropods

Until now, every time we at PCPP heard of another lame Jurassic Park platformer on the console of the day, we cursed the developers for not instantly seeing that the best kind of game for the JP license was of course a Tycoon-style park builder. In fact, the original movie at times even

seemed like one of these games; a poorly run park breaking down and causing all kinds of problems for the innocent visitors. Thankfully then, BlueTongue has seized this opportunity by the stumpy and underdeveloped forelimbs, and produced Operation Genesis.

The player will have control of all aspects of Jurassic Park. Creation of exhibits, visitor access, entertainment, the staples of drinks machines, hotdog stands and toilet blocks, all these are standard fare for theme park sims. But Operation Genesis will also include a detailed dino-creating mode, where bits and pieces of fragmentary DNA can be mixed together to create new beasts, and the player will be able to breed for certain attributes such as aggression or parenting, and must balance the entertainment potential of a big scary dinosaur with the crippling lawsuit potential of having said dinosaur escape and eat guests.

It's coming right for us!

Indeed, at least half of the gameplay in Operation Genesis is about escaping dinosaurs. The game will use a proprietary 3D engine to render the whole park in exquisite detail, enough detail in fact to allow for a firstperson 'visitor' mode. Players will be able to view their exhibits and beasties from the tourist's point of view, and when things go pear-shaped, they can jump into the boots of a helpful ranger armed with a tranquiliser gun and drop old mama stegosaurus before she can maul any

Why Platoon Deserves a Second Look:

It's Rollercoaster Tycoon, but with dinosaurs!

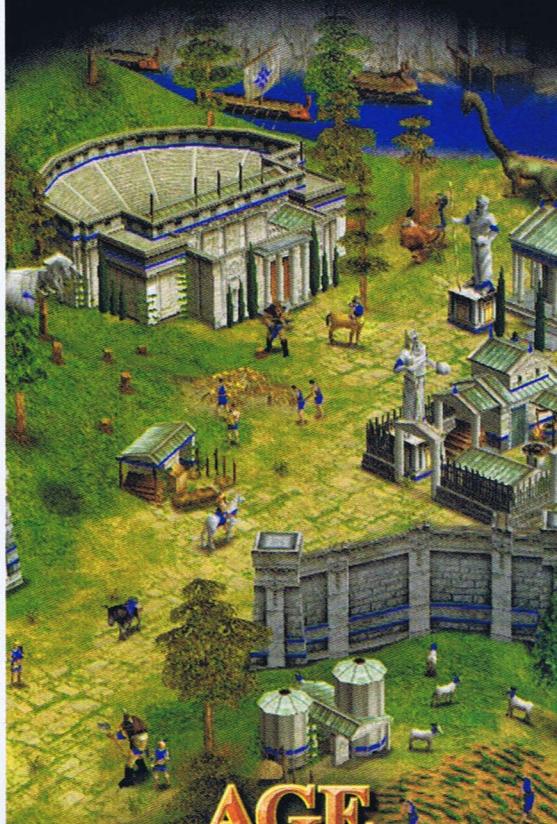
3D engine allows for on-the-ground appreciation of your efforts

Mission-based gameplay relieves management-sim tedium

Dino-breeding program for paleontology freaks



Build a Mythic Empire



AGE of MYTHOLOGY™

From the creators of *Age of Empires*
and *The Age of Kings*

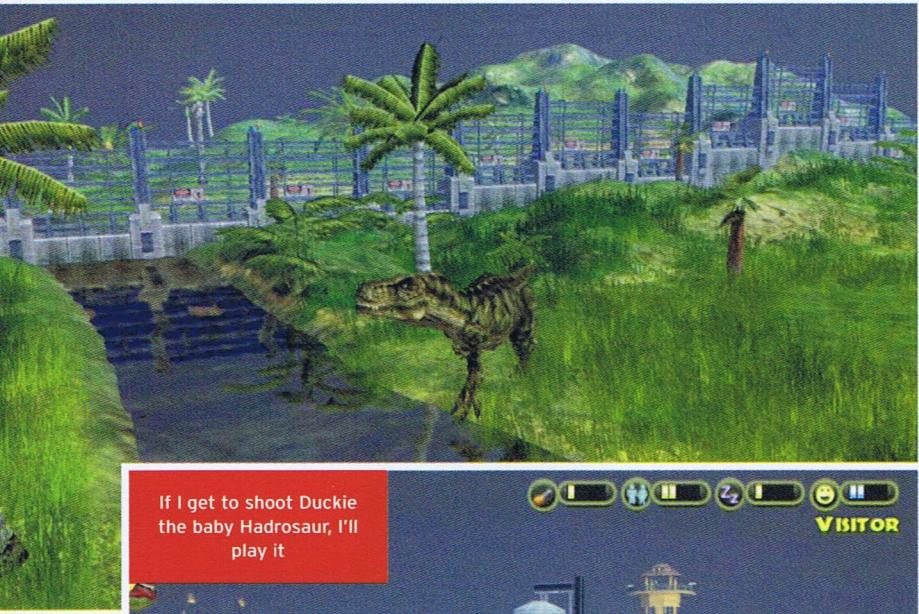
microsoft.com/games/ageofmythology



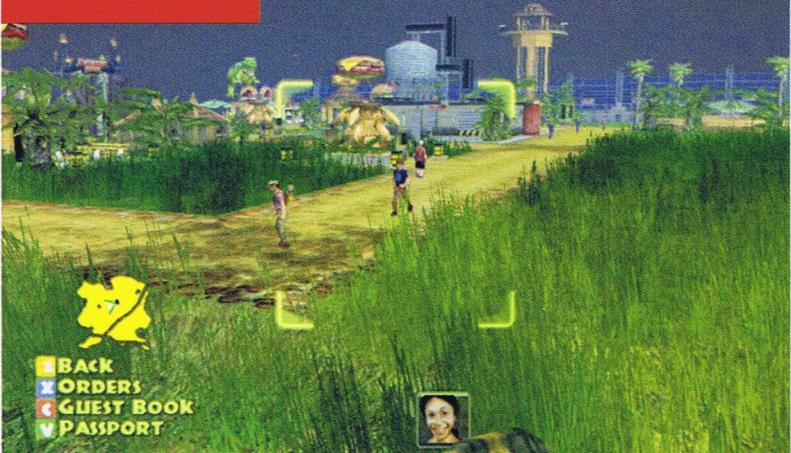
ENSEMBLE
STUDIOS

Microsoft
game studios

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If I get to shoot Duckie the baby Hadrosaur, I'll play it



more Volvos. There will also be a 'chopper cam', useful for chasing down faster and more dangerous escapees, such as the T Rex and those perennial favourites, the velociraptors.

But rather than these firstperson modes popping up from time to time among the serious business of park-building, there will also be a number of scripted missions, where players must regain control of parks, rescue stranded visitors, and convince Sam Neil that even though the second sequel is going to make him a lot of money, it's really going to impact on his reputation as a serious actor.

Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis looks to be the first serious attempt to make something worth playing out of a film franchise that just begs to have a decent game made from it. BlueTongue already did us proud with a fairly tasty Starship Troopers combat sim, let's hope they can keep it up with this rather more prehistoric effort.

Anthony Fordham

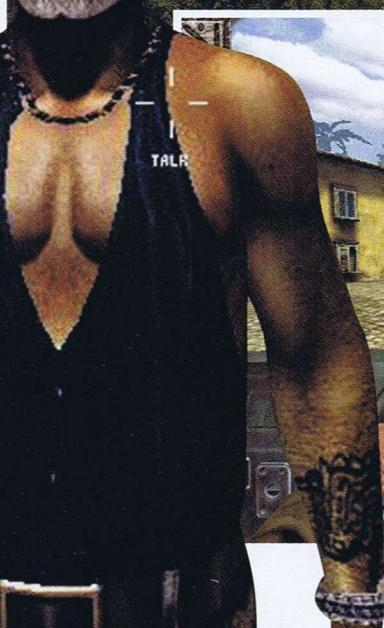
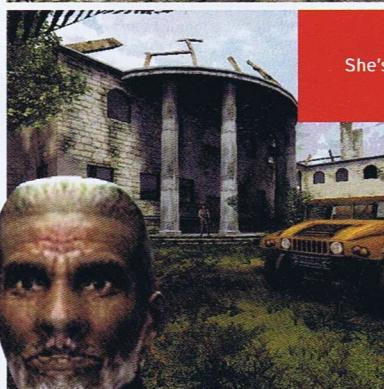


Xenus



Developer: Deep-Shadows ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Due: First Quarter 2003

A unique action RPG set in exotic South America



Why Xenus Deserves a Second Look:

Huge 25km x 25km open world - go anywhere anytime

Skills based RPG elements and 20 types of weapons

Set in an interesting and exotic location

Full Day/Night cycle for greater immersion

The early eighties was a time of 6502/6510 8-bit microcomputers that ran at a "staggering" 1 MHz and yet the variety and breadth of gaming was far wider than what it is today. Games such as Deadline, Cutthroats, Suspect and Borrowed Time allowed us to play more varied roles with scenarios ranging from being a detective solving a murder in a mansion to a deep sea diver on an exotic equatorial coastline. These days we seem to be constantly launched into space or the future amidst Sci-Fi scenarios, sent off to distant lands to partake in Fantasy adventures and fight in WWII or another such war zone.

Virtual Vacation

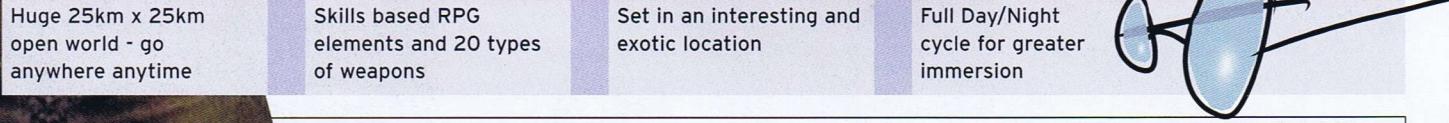
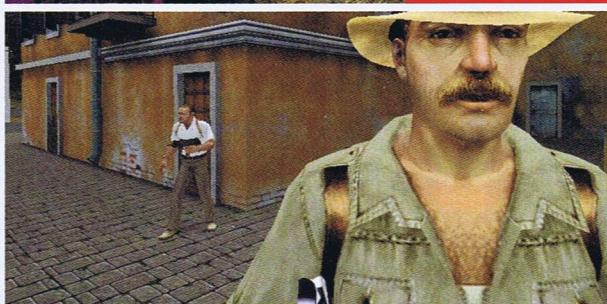
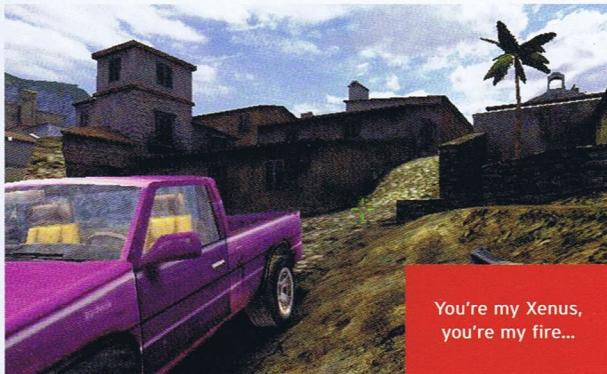
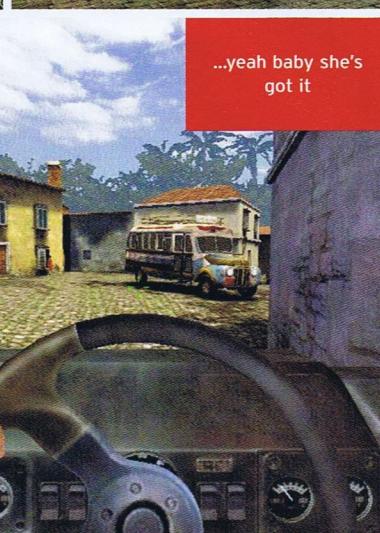
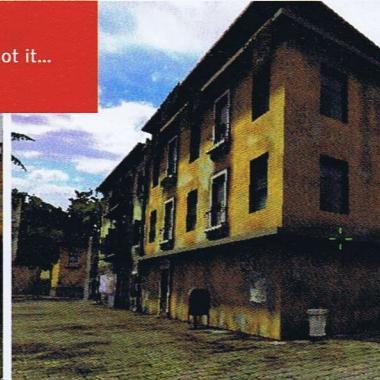
Xenus however represents a pleasant change in that the action takes place in the villages and jungles of Columbia with a huge mystery to uncover. You take on the role of Kevin Meyers, former soldier of the foreign legion who has

received a call from the magazine his sister works for. It seems she hasn't contacted them for more than 2 weeks (maybe she just missed her deadline and is in hiding) and it's suspected that she has been captured in Columbia during a journalistic investigation. Setting off immediately to the aid of his sister, your avatar starts in a dingy and less than sanitary South American village where you have to find out what to do next.

In this regard Xenus is more than a 3D FPS and is best described as a 3D action RPG, especially since there are six different factions that need to be negotiated with: The officials; Guerrillas; Narco Mafia; Natives (Indians); Bandits and the CIA. Best described as a detective role, your goal is not to kill everything that moves, but rather to be allied with the right faction at the right time to uncover the information regarding the whereabouts of your sister.

Loading, Please Wait... NOT!

Adding even more to what will hopefully be an absorbing and interesting game, the game world is not level based but rather one giant 25km x 25km zone where you're given total freedom of movement. Due to the large size of the map a number of vehicles will feature such as helicopters, different makes of car, and tanks will obviously



An exotic location, a mystery to solve and a massive gaming environment should help Xenus make it to the big time

dramatically speed up travel time. This is an extremely immersive element to the game where you can literally get a tip about your sister, jump in a car and drive to the location to investigate it.

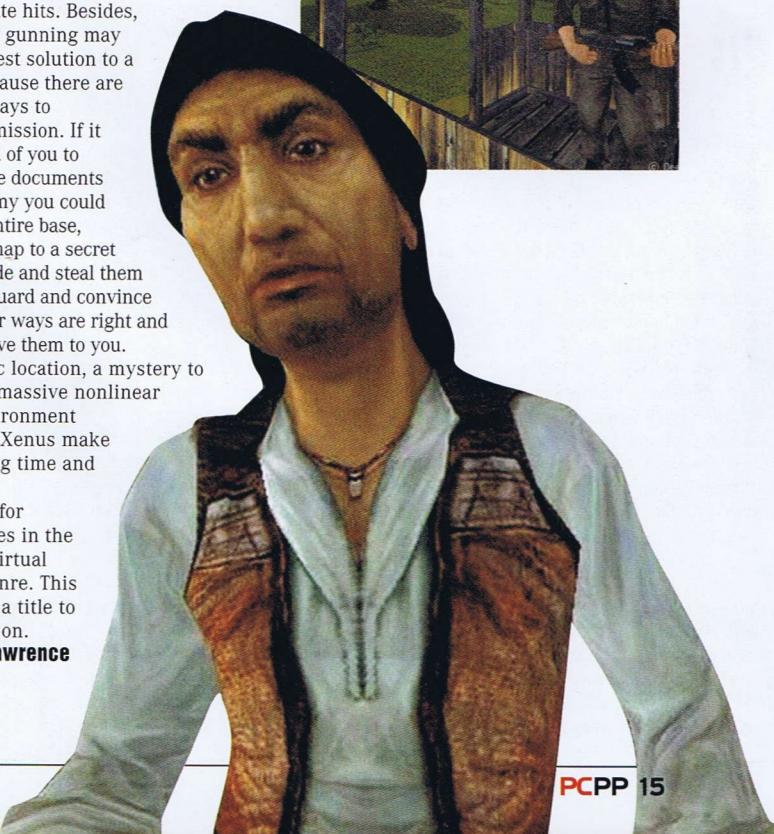
Adding a further RPG element, you start the game unarmed with low skills (we'll just assume that it's been a while since the protagonist left the Foreign Legion) and you will need to earn money to buy weapons and hire vehicles. To earn money it's necessary to take jobs from any of the six factions and the higher they regard you the more money you can earn and the better weapons/armour you can buy. Faction plays a big part in missions as raising it with one faction can lower it with another faction. For example, raising faction with "The Officials" will lower it with "The Guerrillas".

Skills to raise

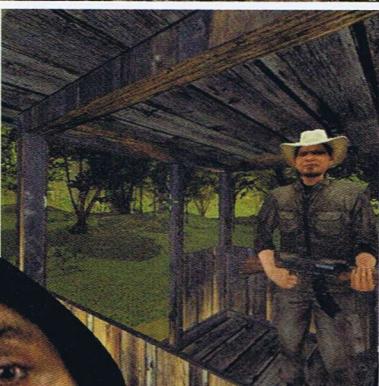
Experience also needs to be earned and in a style similar to Deus Ex it's virtually impossible to run in guns blazing from the outset because your avatar's skills simply aren't high enough for you to score accurate hits. Besides, running and gunning may not be the best solution to a problem because there are numerous ways to complete a mission. If it was required of you to retrieve some documents from an enemy you could take on an entire base, purchase a map to a secret passage inside and steal them or talk to a guard and convince him that your ways are right and get him to give them to you.

An exotic location, a mystery to solve and a massive nonlinear gaming environment should help Xenus make it into the big time and may just be responsible for similar games in the emerging "virtual sandbox" genre. This is definitely a title to keep an eye on.

Jere Lawrence



PCPP 15



Follow a Legend

AGE
of
MYTHOLOGY™

From the creators of *Age of Empires®* and *The Age of Kings™*

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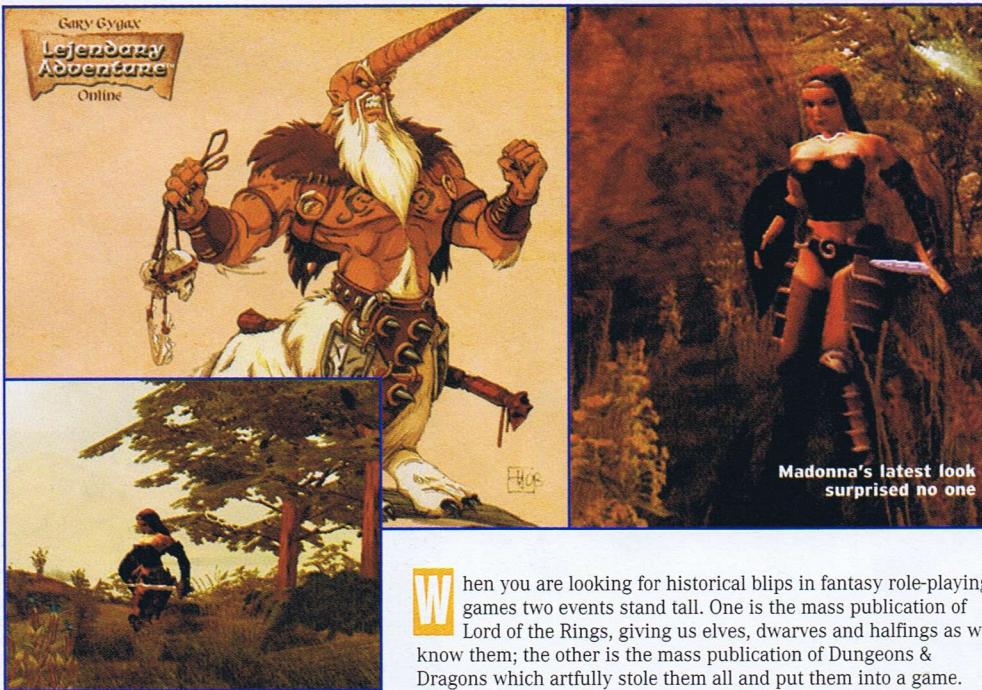
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GAMENEWS

HEADLINES: Lejendary Adventures ■ Gygax ■ Return to Oz ■ ADSL MIA ■ Hollywood Bowl ■ Rising Sun Linux
■ Unreal 64 ■ NeverWinter Expansion ■ Diesel Powered Games ■ Delta Green ■ TerraQuest

LEJEND TAKES ON MMORPG

Creator of D&D steps up to bat



BYTE SIZE

COMPUTER WORLD

For the first time, the world's fastest computer isn't a US device. Six hundred and forty computers networked together make the ultimate beast which currently resides in Japan. The Earth Simulator studies the Earth's climatic patterns including global warming as well as following earthquake patterns. Basically, it's what the Sims games will be like in a couple of years.

When you are looking for historical blips in fantasy role-playing games two events stand tall. One is the mass publication of Lord of the Rings, giving us elves, dwarves and halflings as we know them; the other is the mass publication of Dungeons & Dragons which artfully stole them all and put them into a game.

D&D is the game that launched role-playing in the way we know it today. The creator of D&D, Gary Gygax, has decided to step into the mythical ring and show the whippersnapper developers of Ultima and EverQuest how massively multiplayer role-playing should be.

The game is called Gary Gygax's Lejendary (sic) Adventure and is being developed by Dreams Interactive. The graphics are looking very impressive and were first put on display as a part of an ATI Radeon 9700 and Intel P4 hyper threading demo at Comdex. In short, technology has made a promising start and it goes without saying that Gygax has some clue about RPG gameplay.

No class

For starters there are no set classes and no levels. Characters are more organic than that. You choose how to split up attribute points (which are then modified by a small random amount) and then you choose your skills. If you really want to have a "wizard" then there will be certain templates to help you make the right choices. Once you start adventuring,

Godzilla's incontinence had a dramatic effect on the Hamptons

completing certain goals like finishing a quest or crafting a masterful item will give you merits points which can be spent on increasing skills or buying new abilities.

Each ability and skill costs a different amount and you might find yourself saving for expensive upgrades. This way, even powerful characters won't stomp on newcomers in every way while they will have some much more powerful abilities. Interestingly enough, players will also be able to generate demerit points which slow their ascent if they play out of character.

Players will also be able to garner Repute (hero-like good rep), Dark Repute (like a Clint Eastwood gunslinger - he's vaguely good but scares the pants off ordinary folk) and Disrepute (pure infamy, baby).

Currently, elements like Repute are awarded by living Games Masters so it looks like Lejendary (sic) Adventures is going to have a heavy human element - how this equates into control and overhead costs, we'll just have to see.

Another interesting social aspect of the game is the fact that players will be able to set laws for their domain. Players who want to do dodgy things will be able to make it legal, while players who violate the code (player killers would normally violate a domain's law) would become outlaws with all the problems attached. The domain system and flexible domain law and economy means that players will be able to live a life of danger and excitement by just swinging a pen instead of a sword by tackling politics over dragons.

The game world is set to be 1024 square kilometres at launch but the folks at Dream Interactive suspect this will expand up to 17 times as development goes on. This world and the rules are drawn from Gygax's pen and paper RPG, Lejendary (sic) Adventures which has been around for a few years now. Gygax is obviously quite excited about going online as can be seen by his notes all over the site and swarms of his messages lighting up the forums.

He'll have a little wait before it's all go, though. Lejendary (sic) Adventures isn't due until 2004.

AUSSIE ADSL LAGS

Over half our homes left out

A report by London Economics and Gibson Quai has found that there are many gaps in both metropolitan and rural ADSL support in Australia. The study was commissioned by a new company called Unwired to help formulate its start-up strategy. Telstra says that 70% of lines can now get ADSL with eight percent of lines being too far away to take advantage of an enabled exchange, while five or six percent of lines weren't suitable because of pair gains. This is quite different to the independent study which showed that almost half our homes can't get ADSL at the moment and there will still be 30% waiting by 2005. The cable coverage is even smaller. Wireless companies like Unwired are trying to get up to speed to pick the customers disillusioned by the major carrier coverage. Maybe wireless networks will allow the dream of broadband gameplay for all.



MCGEE'S MACABRE MUNCHKINS

The Land of Oz goes Online



In American McGee's Alice, Alice is in an extremely traumatised state after a house fire kills her family and she retreats into a psychotic fantasy world - a Wonderland like a bad LSD trip. The game had such ambiance that Miramax snapped up the film options almost immediately.

Well, Mr McGee is back at it again, this time with Oz firmly in his sights for maniacal renovation. American McGee's Oz takes place before the coming of the messiah-like Wizard, from a land of dreams, who would rule from behind the curtain.

It is a time of strife and war. The Wizards fight the Witches who in turn war against the Munchkins and their steam-powered arsenal.

The gameplay is shaping to be an action/adventure romp through the land of yellow bricks visiting familiar places (or at least the McGee version) and coming across a host of interesting characters, such as the intriguing Scarecrow Golems.

There will be a central story involving core missions but there will also be a host of non-linear side missions which should send characters further afield and plunge them deep into the oddness of Oz. McGee compares the mission structure to Zelda 64 or Grand Theft Auto 3.

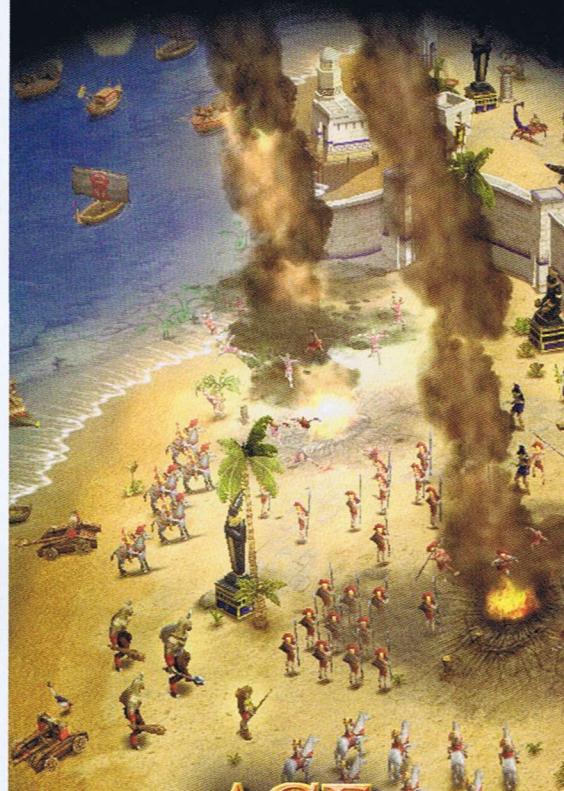
There is a lot of world for McGee to mess with. Apparently, there were 13 Oz books written but only two really made



Mattel's new
Barbie line was
a surprise hit

it to the mass public. The prequel era seems to have left the best options for mass destruction. Just like the toys expect to see a bunch of game-tie ins including a soundtrack, a book and possibly a movie. The next (first?) trip to Oz should be boarding in 2004.

Unleash the wrath of the Gods



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GAMERS ROCK

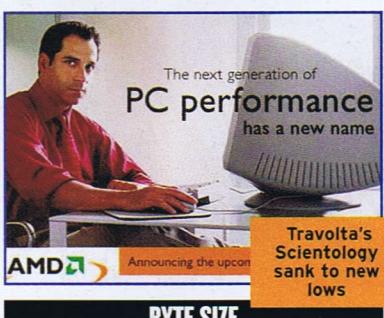
Music Concert to close E3 2003

On the last night of E3 in May expect the Hollywood Bowl to rock. Video Games Live at the Hollywood Bowl is set to be a celebration of computer game music as well as a step towards games music getting the recognition it deserves. Besides high-profile developers, the event organisers are trying to hook in as many celebs as possible including actors who have lent their voices to game characters as well as musicians who support the cause. Currently publishers are being approached for music, with quite a bit of interest being generated and the publishers getting

behind personal favourites. Since most of the early games music was fairly basic and limited to beeping, most of the tunes will be drawn from the more modern, high-production numbers that we've all come to know and love. On the other hand an example of classic music we can hope for is John Williams' version of the Super Mario Brothers theme recorded by the Boston Pops. The line up should be announced sometime in February and stereo and surround sound CDs of the event will be made available. Pay-per-view coverage is even being negotiated.



Pavarotti's pasta binges had got the best of him



Travolta's Scientology sank to new lows

BYTE SIZE

PATRIOT ACT

A 16-page Cyber Security Enhancement Act was added to the Homeland Security Act at the last minute, now American authorities can tap phones or Internet communications without seeking court permission, when an "immediate threat to a national security interest" is suspected. They can also make ISPs hand over user records. Critics argue that the wording of the amendments would also allow schools, the IRS or social security access to your ISP details if they plead an immediate threat. Finally, hackers who recklessly endanger life face life imprisonment under the Act which is all well and good until interesting definitions of reckless endangerment appear.

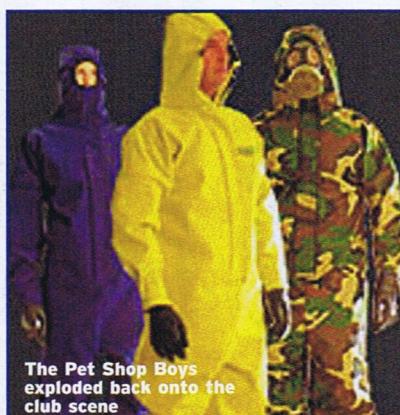
Epic has developed a version of Unreal Tournament 2003 designed to take advantage of the next-gen AMD Athlon 64-bit chip at technology forum Comdex. The game has been developed for 64-bit Linux as a 64-bit version of Windows has yet to emerge. The 64-bit chip promises to boost performance of even 32-bit applications by approximately 15% and that doubles to 30% for 64-bit programs. These increases are based on AMD chips of the same clock speed. Sixty-four bit UT2003 performances didn't actually jump by 30% but that's because so much of the load is handled by the graphics processor - nevertheless it's good to see game companies looking to take advantage of 64-bit gaming even if it's yet to be Microsoft endorsed.

UNREAL 64 ACTION

AMD 64 UT2003 test version



The plumbers responded to the call in record time



The Pet Shop Boys exploded back onto the club scene

BYTE SIZE

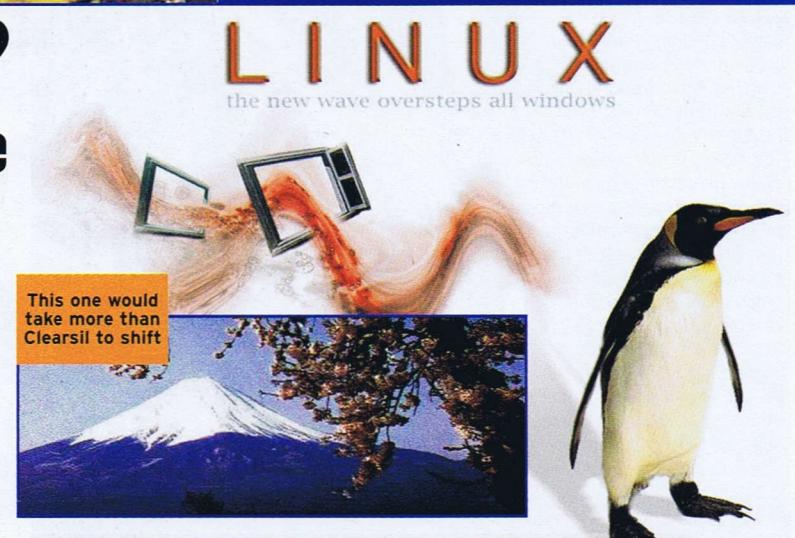
RAD SUITS

Scientists in London have developed a non-toxic, lightweight substance called Demron which can be wedged between two layers of clothing and which not only blocks alpha radiation but beta and gamma as well. Demron blocks rads like lead but as a fraction the weight. According to the PR nano-technology design processes produce a precise molecular configuration to block radiation. Demron also has applications for tents, aeroplanes and spacecraft.

RISING SUN LINUX?

Japan looks at Open Source

A few months ago we looked at a European Union recommendation to move to open source operating systems and now Japan has set aside 50 million Yen for a study into the benefits of such a move at a governmental level. The discussion panel will consist of academics, computer experts and even Microsoft reps with the report due in March 2004. Most of the computers used in Japan's government are currently Windows based, and concerns about cost and security have prompted the study. The members of government on the panel will be expected to travel to other countries and evaluate how their IT is structured so that they can deliver first-hand experience of the ups and downs of open-source code versus Windows. The report will not make any recommendations; once the information is there the choice of OS will be left up to the Ministries and local government.



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Screenshot from Counterstrike

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MORE AD&D ENDEAVOURS

Neverwinter Nights Expands



Two new expansions for Neverwinter Nights have been announced. The first, and most described, is being co-developed by BioWare and Floodgate Entertainment (which is the home of several ex-Looking Glass employees).

Shadows of Undrentide offers about 30 to 40 hours of singleplayer action and supports high-level characters. It also expands many basic aspects of the game adding new weapons, spells, feats (like Extra Bard Music and Divine Might), new skills (like Tumbling) and even prestige classes (now you can become a Harper) not to mention new monsters (fear the gaze of the Medusa and the crow of the Cockatrice) as well as several new tile sets (bring on the ruins).

BioWare is also concentrating on making henchmen more fun to use by ramping up their AI and

letting players outfit the henchmen as they see fit. For the second expansion, currently nicknamed XP2 (being developed wholly by BioWare) the team is looking at allowing you to control two henchmen and they are looking at including a lot of party tech being developed for its other major RPG, Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic.

BioWare has gone on the record as saying that with its expansions now that most of the engine design and multiplayer work is done they are now ready to pull out all the stops. The developers promise new and more powerful enemies and they say that they've been really putting the spit and polish on new AI systems to make the critters live up to their full scary potential.

The details of XP2 are still under wraps but BioWare has commented that the 3rd Edition AD&D ruleset has a very broad scope and leaves them a lot to cover in expansions.

BioWare figures that XP2 should be ready a few months after Shadows of Undrentide and there seems to be quite a bit of competition between them and Floodgate to see who can pull out the best dungeon delving experience.

BYTE SIZE

EVIL SCREEN

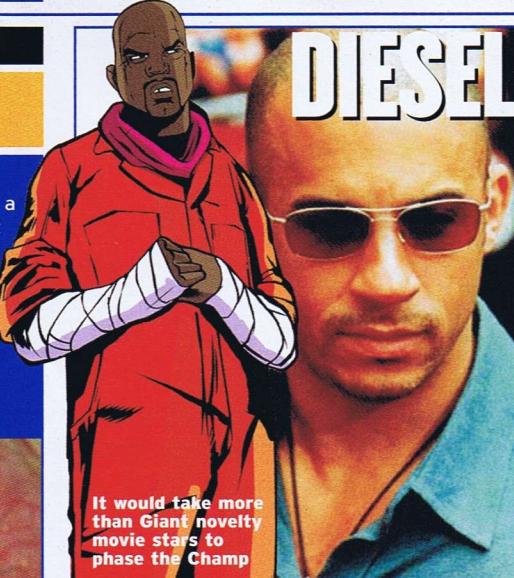
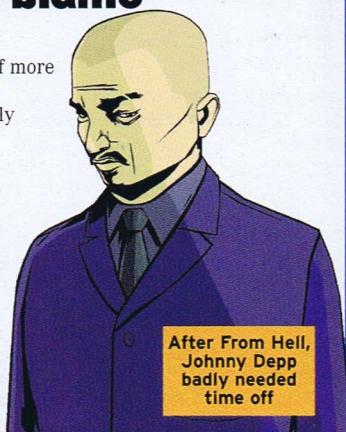
Japanese researchers surveyed more than 25,000 office workers for a Chiba University study. It found that there was a significant link between large amounts of time spent in front of a visual display unit and symptoms of physical and mental illness. The physical symptoms included stiff shoulders, joint pain and eyestrain. Mental woes ranged from headaches, lethargy, reluctance to go to work and insomnia. Five hours a day seems to be the threshold where things start to get ugly. Any more than this and the mental disorders like anxiety and sleeping problems kick in. Wow, that explains the PCPP offices near a deadline...



GTA DEFENCE

Society is to blame

A teen busted for a spree of more than 100 auto thefts has pointed the finger squarely at Grand Theft Auto 3. Cops busted him while he was boosting a parked car from an apartment complex car park. He was in possession of a car reported stolen from the same place a week before. He claims he was inspired by GTA3. We think simple stupidity was a more likely inspiration.



BYTE SIZE

SPAMLESS MAIL

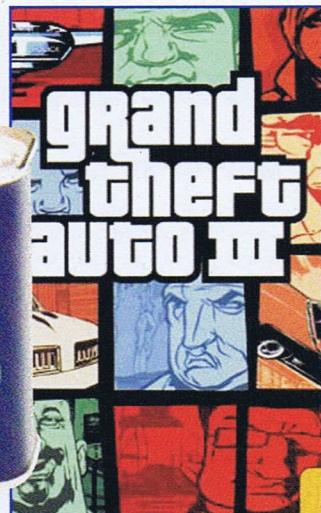
The amount of spam floating around the 'net is prompting people to re-think the way they filter their e-mail. Programs are starting to pop up which switch the notion of blacklisting spammers on its head. This software "whitelists" people you want mail from. Some force a sender to prove they are human by identifying a word in a picture - something humans are good at but auto-mailers have no hope of.



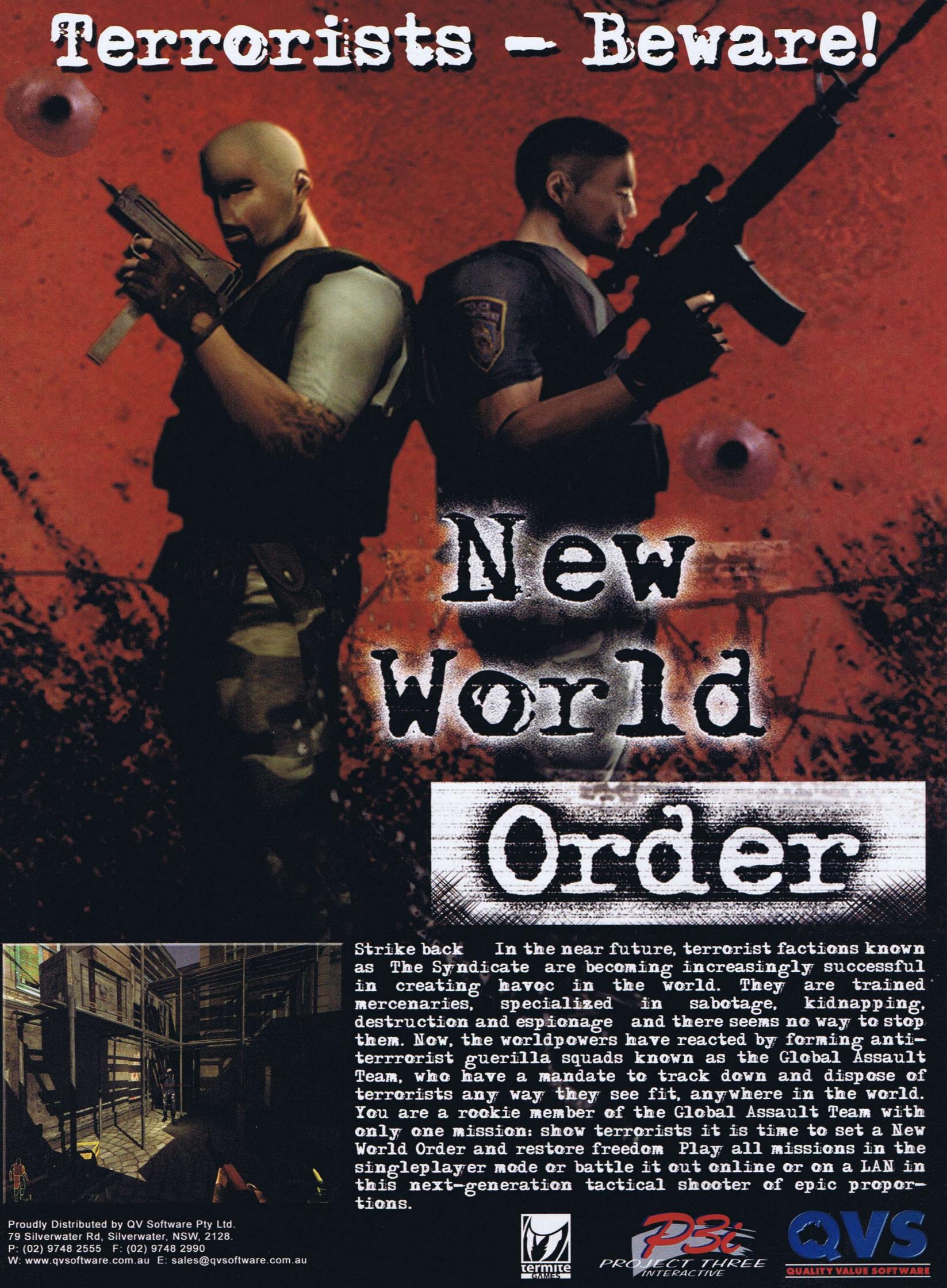
POWERED GAMES?

xXx star wants a game company

Vin Diesel has publicly proclaimed himself a gaming geek and with muscles like that who's going to argue? Like many games fans Diesel got a serious dose of GTA 3. Unlike many game fans Vin has the cash to get games developed when he wants more action. He is starting a company called Tigon Games and its first title will be Perrone, a cinematic tale of a decorated but aggressive 70s cop with a foot on either side of the law (living between the force and the mob). As you might have guessed this is going to be a mature title with some serious GTA inspiration.



Terrorists - Beware!



New World

Order

Strike back In the near future, terrorist factions known as The Syndicate are becoming increasingly successful in creating havoc in the world. They are trained mercenaries, specialized in sabotage, kidnapping, destruction and espionage and there seems no way to stop them. Now, the worldpowers have reacted by forming anti-terrorist guerilla squads known as the Global Assault Team, who have a mandate to track down and dispose of terrorists any way they see fit, anywhere in the world. You are a rookie member of the Global Assault Team with only one mission: show terrorists it is time to set a New World Order and restore freedom. Play all missions in the singleplayer mode or battle it out online or on a LAN in this next-generation tactical shooter of epic proportions.

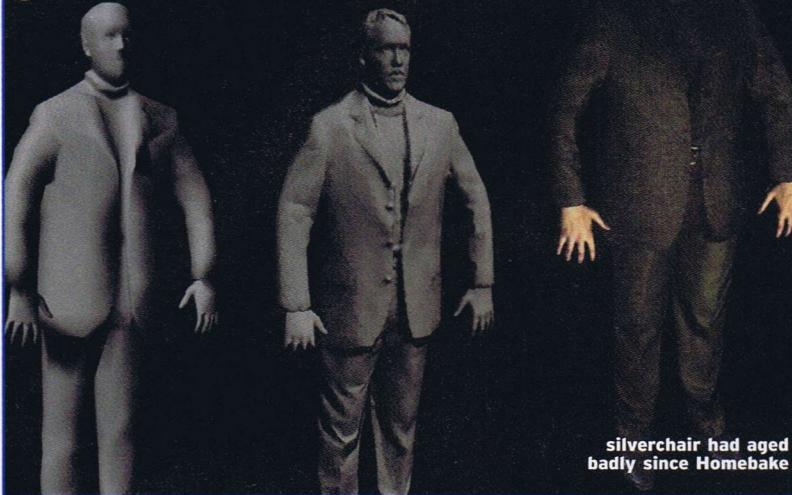


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DELTA GREEN IS PEOPLE

Could Yog-Sothoth get game of its very own?



Delta Green is a team-based strategy horror game being developed by Flying Labs. What makes this game more interesting is that Delta Green is the modern play setting for H.P. Lovecraft's Call of Cthulhu. It revolves around government agents trying to investigate the secrets of the universe (secrets better left secret for sanity's sake).

After seeing Doom III at E3 2002 the developers of Delta Green decided to incorporate normal mapping technology into their design. This involves models of around 300,000 polys being created and mapping their pixel shading and then replacing the model with a 3,000-poly figure so your PC can handle pushing it around. When the pixel shading is applied it gives light and shadow like you have the original level of detail - moving a lot of the work from the CPU to the hardware pixel shader.

Being set in the real world (although we use the term somewhat advisedly) allows Flying Labs to full-body scan consummed actors for the 300K-poly models which is quite handy. It all sounds extremely impressive.

The game also features a third-person perspective which lets you jump into control of any of your units and then has you control your group via a "play book" like you'd find in American football. Play 24, two agents head up the middle while two cover them and a third circles around, hut, hut!

In the world of Delta Green you and your agents have important work to do. The government and your agency have to hide the terrible truth about the universe through carefully constructed fronts while trying to stop the UFOs and servants of the Old Ones from remodelling the world into something that would freak out Jim Rose's Circus.

Delta Green is still in development and seeking a publisher but it's looking pretty interesting so keep an eye out.

CASHQUEST

Pappa needs a new pair of shoes

In the US a game called TerraQuest has swung into motion. Players track down clues in the game world and have them analysed at an in-game lab. The game is one of espionage and shady dealings, spread over six game periods (each roughly a month long) with the objective being to track down a bank account number. The winner of each period of play will win US\$25,000 and the first ten people to unravel period five become finalists.

The first finalist to solve all the clues and find a real-world contact wins US\$125,000 plus 5% of all the players' registration fees. Mind Quest says this isn't gambling, it's a test of skill - no gambling laws infringed on here, move along. Things are made more interesting / expensive because although processing clues at the lab normally takes up to 48 hours, players can pay to have up to five clues a period instantly analysed. Hopefully, it all ends in wacky misadventure like Rat Race.

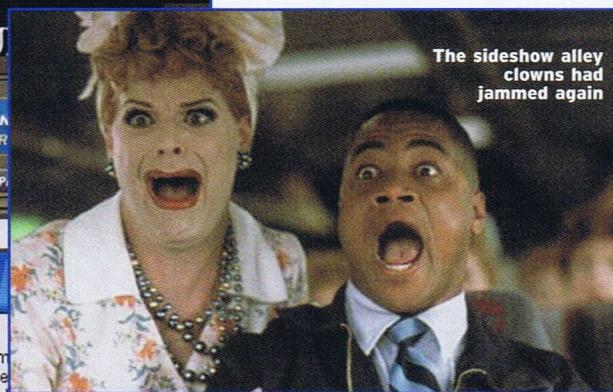


The game will be divided into six game length. Each game period a new clue a variety of media types (exhibits), which will provide the starting of threads already in place. These threads will lead you down different paths will lead to critical information, some will not become game periods, and some will be nothing more than red-herrings.

If there will be a goal. If you reach that goal first, you win \$25,000 usd

of all registration fees will go into the secret bank account. The (in the fifth game period) discover and submit the first half of count number and the identity of the person who possesses the sit box will become finalists and they will compete in the sixth grand prize. The first player to find the holder of the key will receive fifty percent (50%) of the money in the secret bank r finalist will receive five percent (5%) of the money in the bank players who are not finalists will still be able to compete in the and the first non-finalist to locate the holder of the key will also (5%) of the money in the bank account.

Officials had questions about Prince Charles' bookkeeping



The sideshow alley clowns had jammed again

BYTE SIZE

BOND PDA

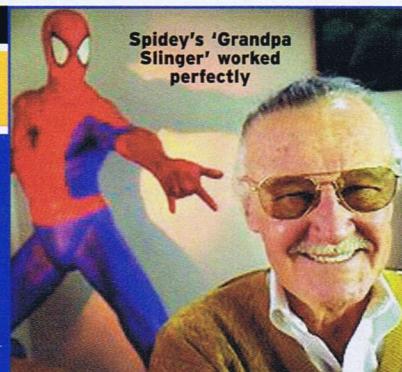
Computer company, Fossil, has announced a fully functioning PDA built into a wristwatch. This puppy accepts touch screen /graffiti input and runs all Palm OS software. The PDA has 2Mb storage and an infrared port built into the watchstrap -not to mention it looks really cool. It'll cost a few hundred bucks and should be here in a few months time.



BYTE SIZE

MOVIE BITS

The BBC is remaking an unfinished episode of Doctor Who written by Douglas Adams after industrial strife stopped the production of the original in 1979. Steven Spielberg is apparently trying to get the rights for a Tintin movie and lastly Stan Lee is suing Marvel Comics because they claim Spiderman (you know the huge blockbuster) is yet to turn a profit (10% of which belongs to Stan).



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PC GameZone



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GAME CHASER

Welcome to a new section where we give you a brief rundown on ten games that have recently crested the horizon, but don't quite warrant the full preview treatment. Many of these games don't yet have distributors in Australia, so there's a chance we may never see them washed up on our pristine beaches. But if we know about them, and make enough noise, well who knows...

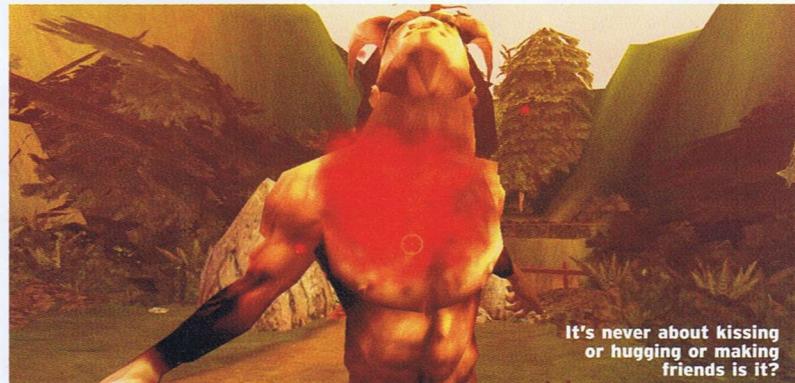
With Timothy C. Best

SAVAGE

Developer: S2 ■ Publisher: iGames ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Q1 2003

Savage is one of those hybrid games, combining two of the most popular PC genres, realtime strategy and firstperson shooter in a cool new way. One player on each side acts like a general in an RTS game, researching tech, building, setting peons to gather resources and telling troops who to attack.

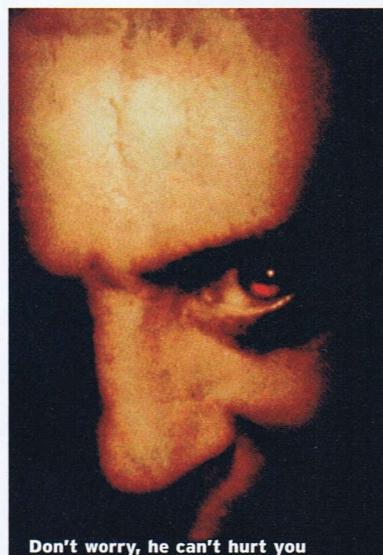
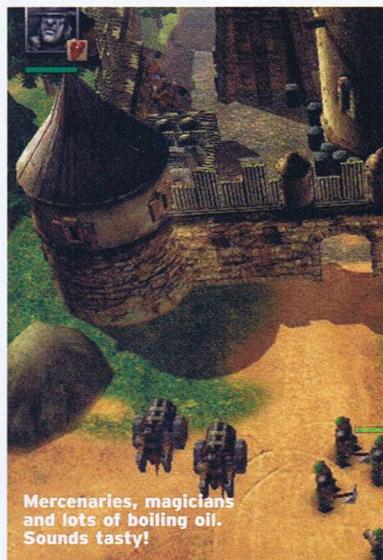
All the other players receive these commands in the form of waypoints and "attack this guy" markers and have to get their hands dirty doing the wet work. Games like Tribes 2 and TeamFortress 2 nod towards this concept but haven't gone quite as far as build queues. Players can take control of the nature-boy side of mystics or go for the post-apocalyptic humans trying to rebuild their tech.



HANNIBAL

Developer: Axel ■ Publisher: Strategy First
■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: June 2003

The game starts where the movie ends with Clarice Starling drugged while Hannibal tends to her. It unfolds as players take control of Clarice to play through a series of flashbacks as Hannibal tells Clarice that they lead parallel lives - they both destroy people who are a danger to society and themselves - but they just have slightly different perspectives. Hannibal (the game) will revolve around FPS action as we relive Clarice's recent missions. The game isn't just all action, there will be plenty of head games and trauma (Clarice has an Anxiety metre which makes people seem more aggressive and can even produce vertigo). Clarice also gets advice from Hannibal all the way through, and if she follows it enough he can even become her mentor...



FIST FULL OF GOLD

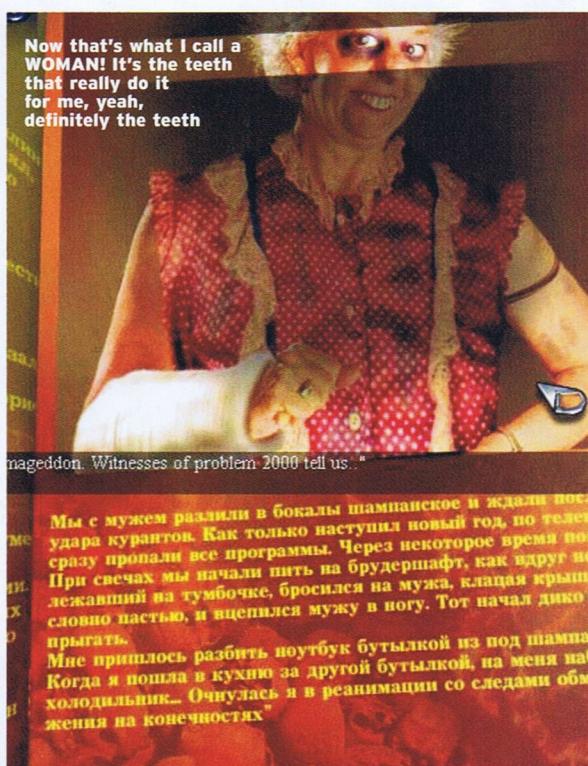
Developer: Axel ■ Publisher: Strategy First ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: June 2003

Imagine the Gunfight at the OK Corral if the corral was a medieval fortress and there was magic flying around as well as lead. That's the idea behind Fist Full (sic) of Gold. Players control a bounty-hunting gunslinger who raises an army of mercenaries to protect the last remaining pockets of civilisation: the stronghold towns. Players will control dozens of troops in RTS battles, being rewarded with gold for every wanted outlaw they bump off. Soon they will have invested in workshops and be hiring Exorcists, Alchemists and even tanks, as well as training up their posse between missions. At the end of it all awaits the biggest Josie Wales of them all: Death Chill.

MIDNIGHT NOWHERE

Developer: Saturn+ ■ Publisher: Buka Ent. ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: 2003

Midnight Nowhere is a good old horror adventure game. There is no violence or action gameplay (although there is plenty of violence in cut-scenes) and players have to use their brains to figure out how to escape one grisly situation after another. Our hero wakes up in a morgue with a toe tag and no memory. Once he escapes the hospital (complete with mental patients) he gets nabbed by a mysterious military installation and then the carnage really begins (the lockup is filled with crims and is assaulted by a maniac). Our hero always manages to see the funny, if dark, side of dismemberment. This will be one for hard-core adventure fans with a love of the macabre.



PSYCHOTOXIC

Developer: NuClearVision ■ Publisher: TBA
■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Late 2003

Angie is the latest in the line of butt-kicking femmes with attitude. This time, however, our heroine has been drawn, unsuspecting, into a life of action - but being from Washington she's probably used to constant danger and sleazy creatures beyond mortal ken. Angie is half angel and, here's the downside to the clear skin, has to save the world from the Apocalypse. She does this both in the "real world" and in the world of people's dreams. This makes for one weirdly twisted shooter involving cults, corrupt FBI and deadly bunny wabbits, that jumps between dark rendering and screwball cel-shading. Curiouser and curioser.



WARNING! This is an Original Concept Free Zone!

WARRIOR KINGS: BATTLES

Developer: Black Cactus ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: TBA

Warrior Kings was a standard mission-based RTS which let players walk the path of righteousness, wickedness or technology. Warrior Kings Battles will use the same engine but take a new approach. Players will march towards one of the two capital cities across a continental map, invading one territory at a time RTS-style. Each zone can have several generals and each general will have his or her own personality, style and allegiance. As players gain land they will pick up new allies, advance in technology, and gain a greater maximum army size. Players will be able to try to run straight for the prize, or gather forces by branching out more. Add in a variety of multiplayer modes and this is looking interesting.



THE SAGA OF RYZOM

Developer: Nevrax ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Late 2003

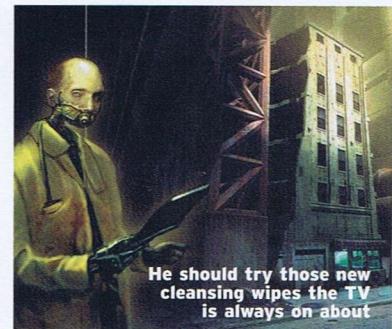
Ryzom is an anime-inspired persistent online fantasy game. It has an interesting aging and heir system as well as giving players the ability to slide between professions while picking up new skills. What makes Ryzom stand out, however, is the mood of the game and the unique world setting. The whole planet is alive - there is not a single mineral or rock in sight. The inhabitants call the world the Planet Tree, and the Planet Tree only takes so much crap. When too many players hunt in one area the world strikes back by spawning creatures to restore the balance. Besides the auto balancing this setting also offers some amazing organic architecture of wooden curves and living buildings. Intriguing and hopefully not rubbish.



MASSIVE ASSAULT

Developer: S2 ■ Publisher: iGames ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Q1 2003

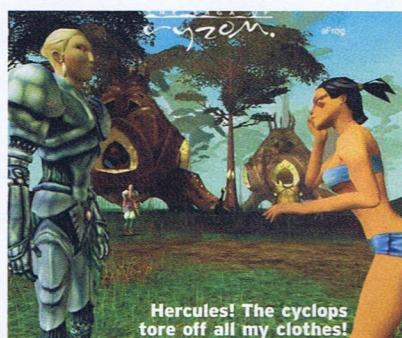
Massive Assault is turn-based strategy on a massive scale. Players command either an "Axis of Good" or a "Shadow Clique", battling for control of one of six planets and, ultimately, the Earth itself. What makes Massive Assault so interesting is not only the planetary scale of the strategy (allowing a lot of room to manoeuvre) but the system of secret alliances which prop up each faction. You'll never really know which factions are supporting the enemy, but you can try to guess and win their support away. The game spits on such tedium as managing peasants but gets right into cutting supply lines, guerrilla warfare and political intrigue. Massive Assault will offer single- and multiplayer mayhem.



DUALITY

Developer: Trilobyte ■ Publisher: Phantagram
■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: Early 2003

Duality is another game that likes to cross genres. The Duality title refers to the two worlds you'll be visiting in the game, the cyberpunk and the cyberspace. You'll take control of three characters to make your way through this tough neon setting. The Merc is your big gun, only good for the "real world". The hacker has neat gizmos for the real world and a fantasy interface (including experience levels and fireballs) for netrunning. Finally, you can play a dead scientist who exists only in cyberspace. Conspiracies, mega-corps, experiments gone wrong and all that stuff are being poured into Trilobyte's creation.



NEXAGON: THE PIT

Developer: Strategy ■ Publisher: TBA ■ Distributor: TBA ■ Available: TBA

The Pit is where prisoners get their final chance for freedom. It's the 44th century and people are bored. Put these two game facts together and what do you get? An RTS game where you battle not only to destroy your foe, but to grab ratings and sponsorship credits as well. Nexagon features a 3D arena with destructible terrain, a variety of units to buy, a base that you can build upon between missions (including gardens and the like to garner more audience support) and loyal troops that gain experience, can be named and grow individually as you go along. We wonder if TV executives are an available unit.



TECH CHASER

So many useful little gadgets and components are released each month, there's no way we can possibly give them all the half-page review treatment in the PCPP Tech Bunker. So welcome to Tech Chaser! Each month, we'll round up ten essential-but-unexciting, simple-but-necessary and plain weird tech bits for your consideration. Let us begin!

With Asher Moses

100 48X CD-R

Price: \$40 ■ Distributor: CompuParts ■ URL: compparts.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9482 2582

The issue many of you are likely to face when purchasing CD-Rs is the fact that you either purchase an expensive disc that can burn at a high rating, or a cheaper CD that will not burn at anything faster than 16x. Naturally, we were quite excited when we heard that CompuParts had a deal running whereby you are able to purchase one hundred CD-R discs capable of burning at 48x for just \$40 (only 40c per CD)! This is certainly the best deal on CD-Rs we've seen and even if you don't use your CD-RW drive on a regular basis, it's certainly a deal worth grabbing as it isn't likely to last very long.



ULTRA-VIOLET NEON LIGHT KIT

Price: \$44 ■ Distributor: AusPCMarket ■ URL: auspcmarket.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9817 2899

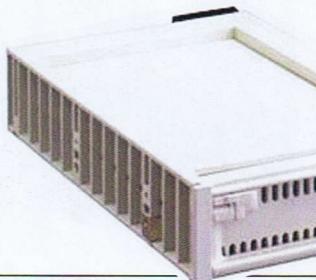
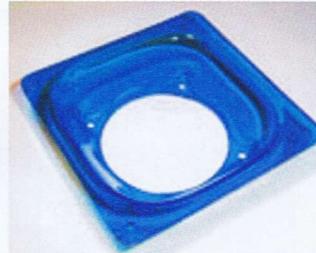
If you're looking to make a fashion statement with your PC, one of the most effective ways to go about it is by filling up your case with plenty of pretty glowing colours. So far, the best way to do this is through the use of a light kit that, believe it or not, can come in a variety of different forms. The two main variations of light kit currently used in the PC are neon and cold-cathodes, however, the most common type available today are the cold-cathodes due to the fact that they do not emit heat and shine brighter due to their tinted casing.

As the name suggests, this particular kit emits a sexy violet glow that is sure to do wonders in garnering interest from the opposite sex (Bwahaha - Ed). Furthermore, the included microphone allows the light to react to sound and music playing nearby, fluctuating brightness levels depending on the type of music played. At \$44 these kits are quite expensive, however, they're well worth it if you like to frequently show off your PC. Conversely, they're not much good if your PC does nothing but sit under your desk 90% of the time either.

60 TO 80MM FAN ADAPTER

Price: \$108.90 ■ Distributor: TechBuy ■ URL: techbuy.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9648 1818

Many believe it is impossible to have both a highly overclocked PC as well as a low-noise PC, due to the fact that with high profile fans comes a faster rotational speed and thus, a higher noise level. However, what if you could put a larger fan on top of your heatsink, in turn allowing the fan to spin at a slower rate for the same amount of air movement? Realizing this, many companies have begun to manufacturer what's called a fan adaptor, coming in many different sizes, including the 60-80mm version we're showing off this issue. As hinted at above, this adapter allows you to mount an 80mm fan on a standard 60mm heatsink - perfect for reducing PC noise while maintaining the effectiveness of your cooling solutions.



ATI RADEON 9500 PRO

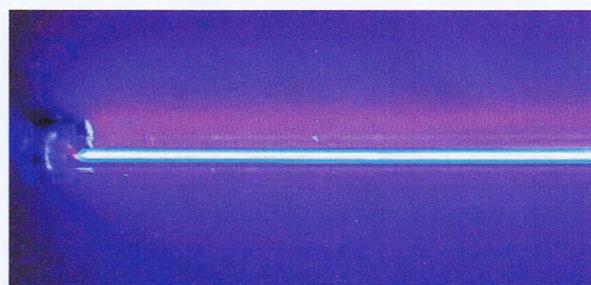
Price: TBA ■ Distributor: PCMarket ■ URL: auspcmarket.com.au ■ Phone: 02 98172899

To fill the gap between the Radeon 9000 and 9700, ATI have recently announced their latest graphics chipset, the Radeon 9500. Put simply, the R9500 is a cut-down version of the 9700, thus putting it in direct competition with nVidia's GeForce4 Ti4400 and Ti4200 graphics chipsets.

The first notable difference between the R9700 and R9500 is that, rather than including four 64-bit memory controllers, the 9500 only features two, effectively cutting the available memory bandwidth to half that of the R9700. Furthermore, the R9500 runs at a core/memory clock speed of 275/270MHz, which is actually quite a bit lower than that of the R9700 which runs at a whopping 325/310MHz.

Early performance numbers have shown the Radeon 9500 Pro performing slightly below, if not on-par with nVidia's

Geforce4 Ti4200 chipset, making it ideal for those that are looking for a high-end graphics card but can't afford the premium price placed on the R9700.



LIAN-LI RH37 IDE KIT

Price: \$108.90 ■ Distributor: TechBuy ■ URL: techbuy.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9648 1818

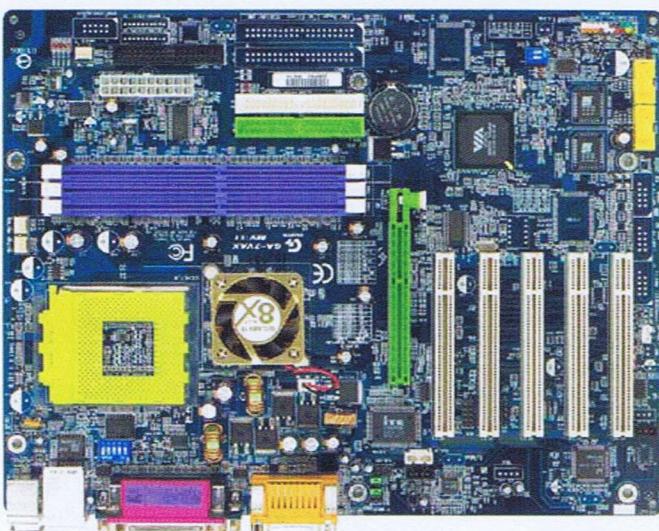
While these little devices aren't given much attention, they're certainly very handy if you find yourself frequently transporting your hard disks from PC to PC. Slotted into a spare 5 1/4" drive bay, the Lian-Li RH37 allows you to hot-swap your drives at will, and is even lockable if you're worried about people running away with your 100GB worth of DivX. The kit works by having your IDE and power cables plugging directly into the rack itself, rather than your hard disk, meaning that you can add/remove drives as often as you like, without even opening your case!



GIGABYTE GA-7VAX

Price: \$175.50 ■ Distributor: SecretNet ■ URL: secretnet.com.au ■ Phone: N/A

Although VIA KT400-based motherboards have featured quite often in PCPP Tech, there are a number of boards we haven't been able to obtain that may be worth your attention. One of the more impressive boards currently available looks to be the Gigabyte GA-7VAX, featuring DDR400 memory support, AGP8x, ATA133 support, onboard audio, onboard 10/100 LAN and USB 2.0. Taking into account the impressive array of bundled software (including Norton AntiVirus 2002 and Norton Personal Firewall) as well as a price of just \$175.50, the board looks to be quite a bargain as well.



ROUNDED IDE CABLES

Price: \$25.30 ■ Distributor: AusPCMarket ■ URL: auspcmarket.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9817 2899

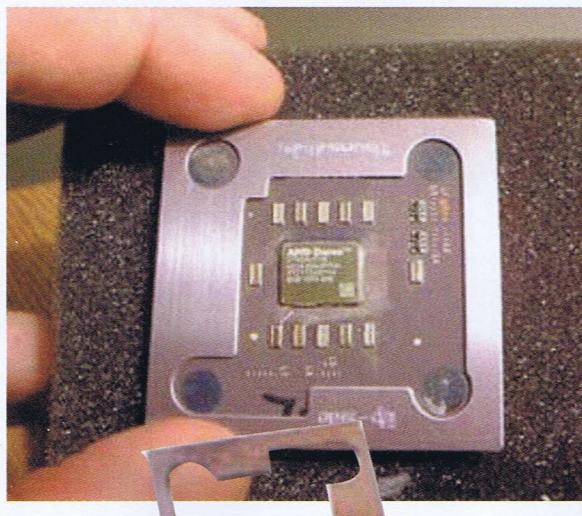
Until SerialATA drives become more common in retail channels, many of us will be stuck with regular IDE drives for quite some time to come. With one of the main advantages of SerialATA being the extremely thin cabling, it is no surprise that manufacturers have begun searching for a solution to the thick ribbon-cable issue seen on regular IDE cables. The end result happened to be regular IDE cables that have been stripped of their plastic covering, shielded from electromagnetic radiation and finally, covered in plastic to keep everything together. This not only increases the airflow throughout your case but also makes it look a lot cleaner and thus, easier to work with.



THERMALTAKE COPPER SHIM

Price: \$7 ■ Distributor: PCCaseGear ■ URL: pccasegear.com.au ■ Phone: 03 9568 0932

Due to the highly fragile nature of current AMD AthlonXP and Duron processors, it is not uncommon to find yourself damaging your newly bought CPU while installing or uninstalling a heatsink/fan unit. As you can see in the accompanying image, the shim sits on top of your CPU, just below the base of the heatsink/fan unit and ensures that the mounting surface is level across the whole CPU, eliminating the chance of a chipped core. For a price of just \$7, these handy little devices are certainly worth it when you consider the amount it would cost you to replace a whole CPU.



IBM 20/40GB TR7 IDE TAPE DRIVE

Price: \$1277.85 ■ Distributor: TechBuy ■ URL: techbuy.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9648 1818

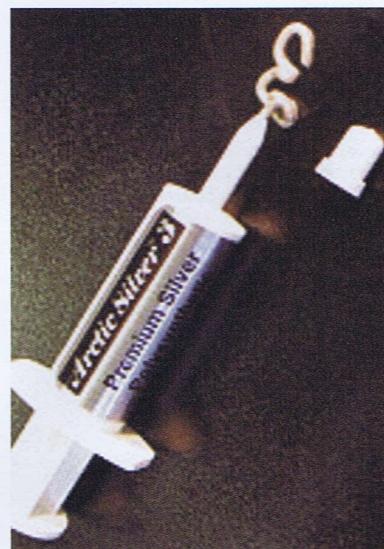
Providing much greater storage space than CD-Rs and being smaller and more portable than external hard drives, tape drives are ideal for those looking to make quick and easy backups of important data, without having to fiddle around with cabling or burning programs. However, one large downside to this added convenience is the fact that this particular tape drive comes priced at a whopping \$1277.85, not including the tapes themselves. This is extremely expensive considering the fact that with this amount of money you would be able to purchase the fastest CD-writer, as well as hundreds of CD-Rs AND a couple of external hard disk drives to boot.



THERMAL COMPOUND

Price: \$25.30 ■ Distributor: AusPCMarket ■ URL: auspcmarket.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9817 2899

Thermal Compound is a necessary part of most modern PCs due to the fact that it ensures full contact between the core of the CPU and the heatsink/fan unit. Although there are many variations of thermal compound available, overclockers and cooling enthusiasts have long regarded the Arctic Silver range as the highest quality available. Coming in a 3 gram tube and being made partly of highly conductive silver, Arctic Silver III is said to reduce your CPU temperatures by 4-15 degrees - well worth the \$12.90 price tag.



AUSTRALIA'S MOST WANTED

The games you want to play now, but still have to wait for

1 C&C Generals

2 Doom 3

3 Unreal 2

4 Deus Ex 2

5 GTA3: Vice City

6 Star Wars Galaxies

7 Sims Online

8 Freelancer

9 Splinter Cell

10 Sim City 4000

Australia's Most Wanted is collated monthly from votes sent to:

amw@pcpowerplay.com.au. Be a part of it, send your 10 most wanted games today!

Unprisingly there's been little movement on the AMW list this month, at least at the top, although a few new arrivals have snuck in down around the lower numbers. C&C Generals and Doom 3 still battle for supremacy, and Generals is narrowly in the lead presumably because we can actually expect to be playing it soon. Tomb Raider was in the 3rd position last month, but this month has completely disappeared to be replaced by GTA3: Vice City which we don't even for sure know is coming to PC - such is fickle youth!

Star Wars Galaxies made a showing this month, but alas recent rumours unhappily confirmed by EA indicate that the game will not be released until late 2003, and an Australian release of the game is actually in serious doubt. EA's other MMORPG that looks set to enjoy immediate success is of course The Sims Online. Presumably as a result of Jere's excellent Beta report last month, folks have been voting steadily for the little people who say "blau!"

In the bottom third of the chart this month we find Freelancer, Splinter Cell and Sim City 4000 - could a more eclectic group possibly be assembled? Freelancer will return free-form space trading to our desktops, Splinter Cell will do for PC what MGS2 did for PlayStation 2, and as for Sim City - well it's a classic isn't it?

I wonder what oddities will make it onto next month's list? Send in your votes now!



3
DOOM
2

GOLDILOCKS AND THE BORG COLLECTIVE WINNERS

We tasked readers with retelling their favourite nursery-rhymes or fairy tales with a Star Trek flavour in order to win copies of Starfleet Command 3. Our overall winner was of course Pablo Inostroza of Newtown, NSW with:

Star Trek Nursery Rhyme

Lieutenant Louise Muffet
Stations on the USS Tuffet
Researching Curds and Whey
Met with Ambassador Spider
Who beamed down besider her
And she ripped him in half because she
was half Klingon, half Romulan and had
run out of blood wine or Romulan ale
and started an intergalactic war that
lead to the new series

Our other winner was the aptly named Rod Limerick of Booragoon, WA with his charming retelling of Hansel & Gretel entitled Dax & Bashir in which there were so many obscure Deep Space 9 references that our brains nearly turned into Brockian Ultra-Goo!



THERE IS NO PCPP WINNERS

In order to win a copy of alternate-history shootfest Ironstorm, readers were asked to create a timeline of a different past, a past in which PC PowerPlay was never founded and Australia existed without a PC-dedicated, independent gaming mag. And the responses just rolled in. Dozens of entries, all complete with intricate alternate histories. Some suggested that no PCPP meant an explosion of pornography, leading to civil disobedience and anarchy. Others suggested that the presence of current day PCPP staff in other IT careers lead to amazing leaps and bounds in technology, technology that was inevitably misused leading to civil disobedience and anarchy. Others suggested that aliens would answer humanity's impassioned call for a voice of reason, come to Earth and totally overthrow our outdated social structures, leading to civil disobedience and anarchy. In fact, as wide and varied as the responses were there was one central theme: no PCPP means a world in a chaos, a world without structure, a war plagued by war, death, famine and the other guy. In the end we couldn't decide, plunged all the entries into a hat, plunged our hands in after them and drew five at random. Here they are: James Gartner, Fulham Gardens SA; Tim Mortimer, Katoomba NSW; Jarrod Mastlin, McKellar ACT; Tyson Dale, Matcham NSW; Iain Irving, Yallourn North VIC. Well done to everyone!

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY! COLLECTORS EDITION AND 4 COPIES TO BE WON!

You like Age of Mythology. You want Age of Mythology. You know this because you're an intelligent and sophisticated gamer. We know it because we know you. And that's why we've ambushed and forcibly removed one of the extremely limited-run Collector's Editions of Age of Mythology from a gaggle of hapless Microsoft representatives. Inside, one lucky winner will find this:

- Soundtrack CD
- The Making of Age of Mythology DVD
- Six mini-posters of the major Gods of Age of Mythology
- Massive movie-style poster
- Minotaur figurine
- Free Bulfinch's Mythology book
- Oversized technology trees

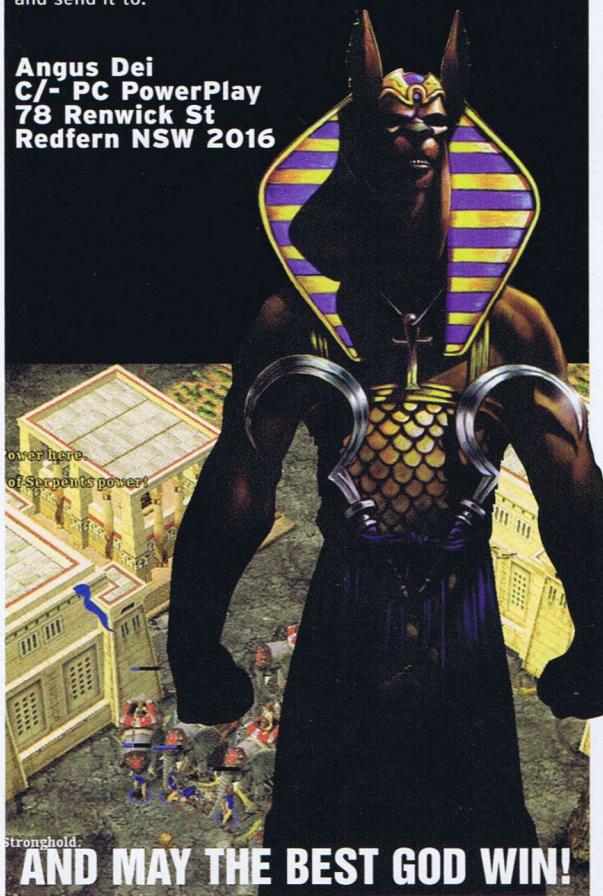
This whole kit and kaboodle is worth a stupendous \$120, but don't worry if your hoop-jumping antics don't impress us enough to give it to you, there's still 4 copies of the regular version of the game to give away. Either way, 5 lucky readers will be walking away with AOM and playing it long, long into the night. So here's what we want:

As far as we can tell, gaming needs a God. And we don't mean a gamer like Thresh or Fatality that losers can look up to, we mean an actual God, a being of superhuman and supernatural power that can watch over us, punish the wicked and reward those who resolutely refuse to use wallhacks or aimbots.

So we want you to design this god. What does it look like? Is it male or female? What's its totem animal? What powers does it have?

Either write it all down or photoshop us an amusing image and send it to:

Angus Dei
C/- PC PowerPlay
78 Renwick St
Redfern NSW 2016



COMING SOON

FEBRUARY

2003

C&C Generals (EA)	17/02/03
Championship Manager 4 (Infogrames)	07/02/03
Delta Force: Black Hawk Down (EA)	09/02/03
Dragon's Lair 3D (Ubi Soft)	20/02/03
Ghost Master (Vivendi)	13/02/03
I.G.I. 2: Covert Strike (Infogrames)	14/02/03
Imperium Galactica 3 (Take2)	08/02/03
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	24/02/03
NASCAR 2003 Season (Vivendi)	20/02/03
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield (Infogrames)	20/02/03
Tomb Raider: Angels of Darkness (Infogrames)	28/02/03
Ultima Online: Age of Shadows (EA)	15/02/03
Unreal II (Infogrames)	15/02/03

MARCH

2003

1503 AD New World (EA)	06/03/03
CSI: Crime Scene Investigation (Ubi Soft)	13/03/03
DeltaForce: Black Hawk Down (EA)	27/03/03
Devastation (tba)	01/03/03
Freelancer (Microsoft)	13/03/03
Ghost Master (tba)	27/03/03
Lock On (Ubi Soft)	06/03/03
One Must Fall Battlegrounds (tba)	04/03/03
Planetside (Ubi Soft)	13/03/03
Praetorians (Infogrames)	01/03/03
Rayman 3 (Ubi Soft)	03/03/03
XIII (Ubi Soft)	17/03/03
Tron 2.0 (EA)	15/03/03
Will Rock (Ubi Soft)	13/03/03

APRIL

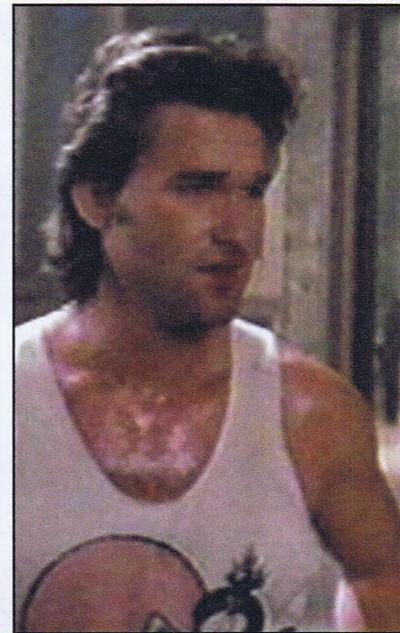
2003

Jurassic Park: Project Genesis (Vivendi)	14/04/03
Lionheart (Interplay)	07/04/03
Republic: The Revolution (Infogrames)	28/04/03
Tropico 2: Pirate Cove (Take2)	18/04/03

WE CAN BE HEROES



Timothy C Best



Villains are easy; it's the heroes that are hard. It's that way for movies, comics, novels and it's especially that way for computer games. I've been racking my brain for my favourite, all-time, do-gooders, but besides the Mountie, all my favourites either have a huge attitude problem or are very angry, stupid or flawed people.

There's Evil Dead's Ash, Big Trouble in Little China's Jack Burton, Due South's Fraser, Alien's Ripley (and Vasquez), Escape from New York's Snake, The Tick, American Beauty's Lester, Ford Fairlane and maybe Madonna's character in Who's That Girl (although I need a boot in the backside for mentioning that in public). They all have something in common: they stick in your head because they are uncommon. They do stuff that you'd never even think of doing, and even when the movie gets slow they still have their own style - it's all in the reflexes. Writing good central characters is really, really hard. You get to see a lot of them. A character like Darth Maul is easy. You only see him for, like five minutes. Writing mind-blowingly cool for five minutes is easy.

Digitised Devil-May-Care

Imagine how tough it is to write computer game heroes. You not only see them all the time but you become them. There are two schools of thought for lead character design and creation. One is that you should be the character, it's you immersed in the world the character lives in - after all you certainly don't have any established character's knowledge of the world and you will be making all of the decisions. Gordon Freeman from Half-Life is one of these characters. Sure he has a name and an academic record, but that's about it. The faceless Marine from Aliens vs Predator or Quake is the same.

On the other side of the fence you have the real characters. They have their own style and you're pretty much along for the ride with them. If you think about all of your favourite game characters they are this type. Duke Nukem stole pretty much all of his lines from the movie characters I mentioned above (Rowdy Ronnie Pipe might come back for his chewing gum and kicked arse and Ash is sure to want to know what Duke's doing with his Boomstick) but who could forget when Duke made good on his promise to rip off his opponent's head and you-know-what down his neck?

Another personal fave of mine was watching Under a Killing Moon's Tex Murphy, PI, dance around his apartment with his gun yelling, "Bang, bang-bang" pretending to shoot people before fumbling it out the window. "Hey kid, could you just throw that back up here?" Needless to say it neatly answered the question of why a private dick didn't have a gun for the whole game.

All About Control

Here's the conclusion I've drawn. Unlike some many things in computer games, good characters come from a lack of control. It's when the characters shine through that you get their memorable flavour. Think about your favourite movies. The ones that really get you. They always have characters with well-established vices and virtues and the turning points of the movie are where you're not sure if they will rise above these flaws or just lose it and accept defeat. Otherwise, they are characters who dig themselves deeper and deeper, doing things that no sensible person would consider. It's about control, self-control and the elements of the character which define them as being interesting. If players are in control, instead of a character's vices and virtues, then where's the drama?

Right about now you'll probably pull out your Gordon Freeman. Half-Life was a brilliant game and it transferred meaning and drama into the player. Even though you don't really know Gordon, you immediately identify with his fight to survive and you immediately get pissed off with the military for trying to kill him after he makes it through all the aliens. It creates an emotional link. The same goes for the Marine in Aliens vs Predator: you don't know the guy but you become him as your light is fading and you can hear the scuttling of a facehugger coming at you through the darkness. Don't tell me there is no character identification there. But this works on the same principal, it's your lack of control that gives the character drama.

What am I Saying about Games?

I'm saying I expect better heroes in games. If I'm playing Madonna's character in Who's That Girl: The Reckoning, after I perfectly demolish five guys with a 98% hit accuracy I want my character to stop and do a dance on some furniture (probably involving a tutu). I want character quirks to reward me if I do something good, or in Jack Burton's case, something bad. They would be like Easter eggs. I want the game to keep track of my hit accuracy and damage or time taken and I want my character to make comments like, "yeah, you better run," or "I still have some bullets left back here." It would be like dynamic music - it would be dynamic characterisation.

The new game Hannibal (see Game Chaser, p24) has an interesting characterisation element in the anxiety metre. This means that even if you know you can just go back to a save, Clarice does not. As she freaks out the world gets becomes scarier, and players see the people in the world acting and looking more aggressive - but it's all in

her head. Once again it's about control. Players still need to feel like they make the big calls and that their actions make all the difference but this doesn't mean you can't have some fun with your lead character and have them shine through the player's control from time to time.

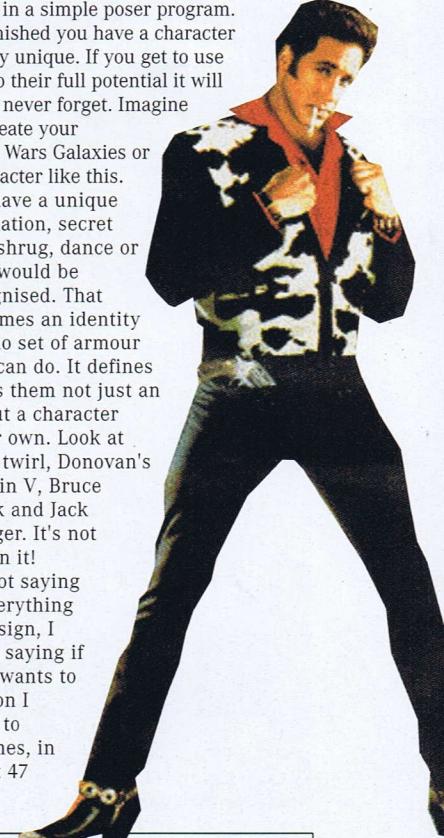
Darth Maul is easy. You only see him for, like five minutes. Writing mind-blowingly cool for five minutes is a piece of cake

Prince Paradox

The paradox behind this concept is that the complete opposite is also true. Game developers can create characters the players will always remember if they give them complete control. There's a fighting game on the PlayStation that lets you create your character's complete move set frame by frame in a simple poser program. When you've finished you have a character that will be truly unique. If you get to use this character to their full potential it will be one that you never forget. Imagine being able to create your EverQuest, Star Wars Galaxies or Freelancer character like this.

You could have a unique gun twirl animation, secret sword combo, shrug, dance or whatever that would be instantly recognised. That character becomes an identity in a way that no set of armour or hair colour can do. It defines them and gives them not just an appearance, but a character outside of your own. Look at Robocop's gun twirl, Donovan's shooting style in V, Bruce Lee's nose flick and Jack Burton's swagger. It's not that hard, damn it!

Look, I'm not saying that I know everything about game design, I don't, but I am saying if any developer wants to hire me I reckon I should be able to make your games, in theory, at least 47 times better.



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THE LEGACY OF K-TEL

The Guerrilla Gamer



Lately I've been wondering why IBM really made the PC. Up until now we all blindly assumed it was just a predictable expansion of the computer industry from business and industry into the home. Just innocent exploitation of an untapped market in order to bring the power of modern technology into the everyday lives of the common man, nothing sinister or alarming at all.

By coincidence worldwide marketing phenomenon K-Tel, most likely known to you if you're an old geezer or second hand record buyer, disappeared mysteriously and without trace. For years they had pumped out countless numbers of vinyl classics such as 'Ripper 77' whose cover, now hanging in the Louvre, featured a close up of some tasty 70s ass in some strategically torn denim hot pants. Their products set the 70s world alight with excitement: their famous dual action salad carousel and wart remover won every design award the Ukraine had to offer, while their 14 speed 'personal massager' became the industry standard in the mining and excavation business.

K-Tel led the way for so many of today's cultural icons. Without them we wouldn't have those really cheap annoying ads where some bloke with a whiney voice talks at a million miles an hour about cane furniture. They were the first ones there when companies started being 'cool' to sell their wares to teenagers. How much cooler could you get than the K-Tel home disco light set? Only by also owning the K-Tel polyester patching kit for repairing your slacks, torn up on the dance floor!

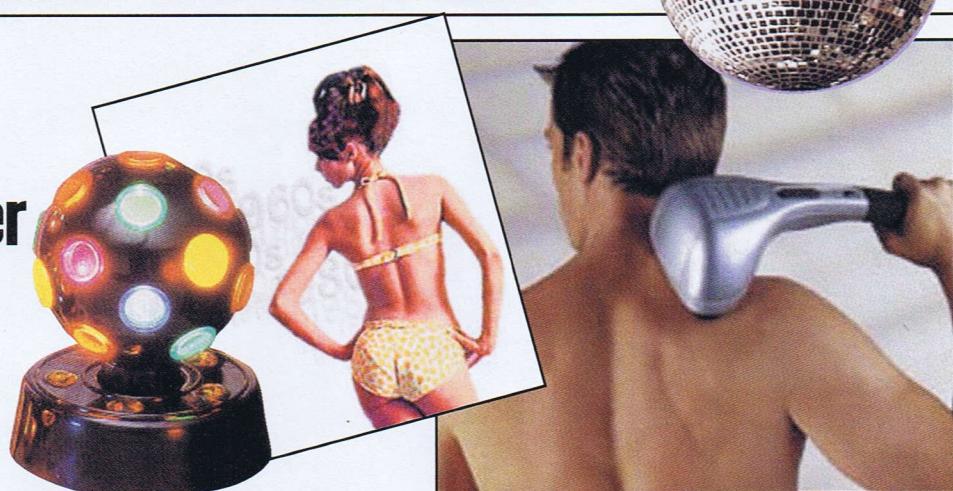
One day they were on top of the world, the next... oblivion. Or so we thought.

Cycle of Destruction

Mere moments after the K-Tel ship sunk into the ocean of economic depression that infected the western world in the early eighties IBM emerged victorious with a product seemingly at odds with everything the company had ever done. A product so cunningly devised that its users would have to spend the rest of their lives upgrading it. A product so brilliantly conceived that it actually generated an entirely new genre of products around it. A veritable solar system of support services, help desks, industry groups and other assorted spin offs. By God what genius!

An accident? A coincidence? Phooey, we all know there's no such thing.

Some time in the late '77, when no one could have predicted that the seventies would actually be more popular in the nineties than they were in the seventies, and even last longer, The Ivory Tower that was K-Tel HQ was buzzing with the news that Holden was planning to replace the Kingswood with a totally new concept called the Commodore. Opinion was divided on whether or



not the new model should have velour or genuine monkey hide trim and the situation was becoming rather heated when one of the boys suddenly blurted out 'computers'.

Three days later, after snorting several kilos of Ajax and having their office walls reupholstered in nougat, these guys had created a whole new consumer concept that would quite easily have made Milton Keynes, the father of capitalism, weep with joy.

Weepy Milton

Imagine, they thought to themselves, a product that never, ever dies or goes out of fashion. A product that keeps demanding more and more, like a hungry chick in its nest, and is never satisfied. This would be a product that was not an end in itself but merely a means, a pipeline, to even more products. An object which, when placed in the home, becomes a magnet constantly sucking at the purse strings of its owner like some ravenous techno leech.

The evil genius behind it is quite astounding. It's almost like a self contained AMWAY that you inflict upon yourself. Anyone who has ever had a friend or acquaintance turn up at their doorstep with their previously hidden AMWAY folder under their arm and a slightly guilty look on their face will know what I mean. It sits there and demands that you spend your money on it, in a very subtle way of course. That's the secret.

Those K-Tel guys have done their job so well your PC can actually make you think that you need the objects it is tempting you with. How many of you have gone out and bought a GeForce 4 Ti4600 only to find that there are hardly any games around that use its unique features? How many of you have realised by now that they will most likely never be used?

Sounds rotten

Sound hardware is another highly overqualified contender to the throne of consumer king. These days PC sound cards offer more than a music producer would have found in EMI's biggest recording studio twenty five years ago. Who can really tell the difference between a 16 bit sample and a 24 bit sample when played through a typical set of PC speakers? No one being honest. Sure it makes you feel important to have all this power at your disposal but what for? To make you want even more of course, nothing is more addictive than power!

Where or when will it end? When graphics cards are able to render the whole of Peter Costello's ego in four dimensions, in real time? When sound cards can re-materialise cloned members of Led Zeppelin to do a live performance in your living room? In short when the end

products of these gadgets become so complex and difficult to achieve that programmers take up playing Battleship instead?

We are starting to see console sales really boom in the US and Japan where online play has become available. It seems only a matter of time now when the ease of programming consoles in comparison to PCs will make them the game platform of choice for all developers. If the K-Tel inspired buccaneer capitalism of the PC world isn't reined in soon fine magazines such as this one may soon have nobody to sell copies to, and no games to write about anyway. Well maybe that's an exaggeration but every PC gamer has to agree that the variety and originality of PC games has drastically declined over the years to a point where practically everything we see now is just an update of an older product in one form or another. That's where it's biting, harder and harder each year.

The Guerrilla Gamer is a veteran games journalist with a particular set of very peculiar views. After having his brain refried via his eyeballs more than sixty four thousand times thanks to a faulty 15" Hyundai monitor, he now has the power to jump expertly to wild and fabulous conclusions without a moment's hesitation.



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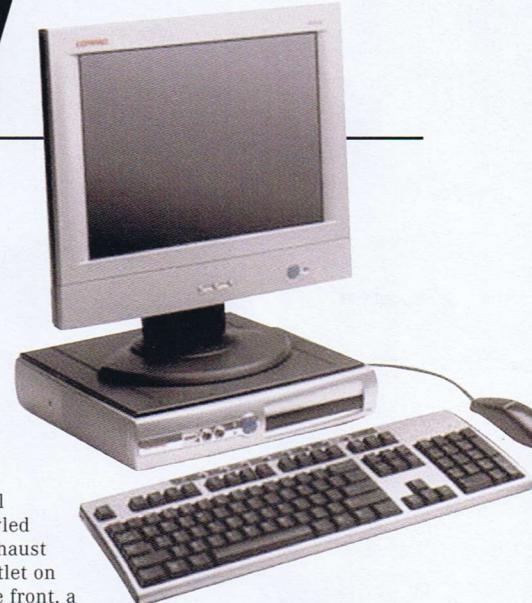
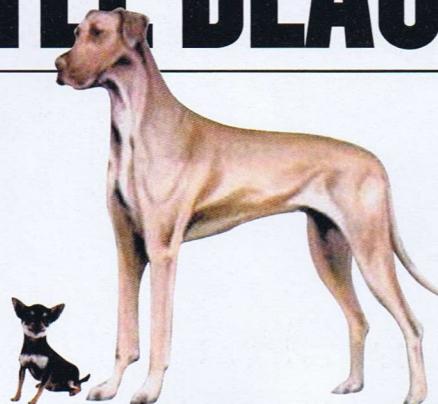
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YOU LITTLE BEAUTY

Stuart Calvin



Melbourne Cup Day, for me, included a signal event of such proportions that I am still overwhelmed by it. The earth shifted, the air shimmied, the feelings were palpable and I can't think of any more hyperbole to describe me and my new work PC. You see, I used to have a government furnished P2-266, running NT4 with 64MB of RAM on a PIO Mode 4 hard-disk. I know what it's like to try and run Word, PowerPoint and Outlook together on rubbish like this - bloody awful. I can't then imagine what it's like to run BF1942 or UT2K3 or Neverwinter Nights on such a low-spec PC. There are readers who try to describe to me what it's like playing on one of these veterans and I suspect it's a bit like scraping one's fingernails down the blackboard.

There are about 90 new desktops in our floor-node; two to a workspace, four to a little block and eight to a section between walk-ways and building columns. A few of us are in office boxes with real walls and a door whereas the wage slaves make-do with half-height partitions (Like me - Ed). These small groupings are great if a lot of collaborative and brainstorming work is done, which we do, or there are several people involved in the one project which we are. But I digress.

24hr Uptime!

I don't have to resort to pen and paper at 1 PM anymore, for an hour or so, as the network disk-defragmenter thrashes itself into a frenzy. I don't have to open Internet Explorer at 7:30AM so I can use it by 9:00AM if I have to check the IntraWeb. I can send an 11MB spreadsheet, loaded with pivot tables and macros, from within Excel in seconds without having to wait 3 minutes while the old Pentium churned its way through the making of a Outlook .tmp file. Sure,

it's still 10 Mbps twisted pair network stuff but if I keep my work and downloads on the server side of things, I get cable-speed response. Download Win2K SP3? Absolutely: 130MB in less than 10 seconds. The software Nazis will never know because I can cut it to CD and delete it before they blink out of their self-satisfied stupor.

It's very quiet. Deafening silence greeted me on PD+1 (post-Dinosaur plus one day or the day after Melbourne Cup readers). I can't see anyone from our stairwell landing and upon taking the last step to the first floor (yes, I do exercise), I thought something was wrong. Yes, terribly wrong. Was it Sunday? Had I missed a tongue lashing? No, I knew it wasn't Sunday as the Chief of Home Front hadn't sullenly yelled at me as I left home for the Great Grey Sponge and the kids had chatted to me over breakfast in their school uniforms - check. Yes it was actually a real workday - check. I could never overhear any conversation at work from my office even with the door open, (except Jason who shouts at everything and who's twenty feet away) I only know the box is fired up because a little green light tells me so. It's so quiet, I keep wanting to turn it on each morning (monitors are off at night). It's so quiet, I can hear Jane, next door, talking about her margin loans; it's so quiet, I can hear the fridge which is on the other side of Jane; it's so quiet I could probably hear Jane talking about margin loans from inside the fridge if the mouldy coleslaw ever grabbed her. It's very quiet if you didn't get my drift and very small.

Real estate

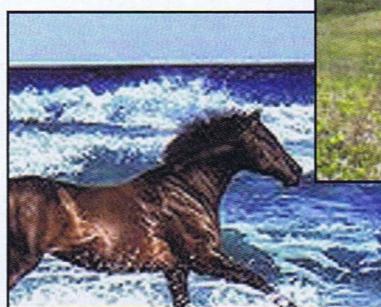
My new baby is literally dwarfed by my Philips 201B (that's a 21" puppy for you mortals). I was afraid the Philips was going to crush the box to dust but it's made from a decent gauge of steel sheeting with only the silvery bits made from plastic. The box is 315mm wide, 90mm high and is 355mm deep and that's a lot smaller than any desktop you've seen recently. It's black and grey with a shark-

gill styled exhaust outlet on the front, a bit like the British Spitfire fighter aircraft had on the nacelles. The rig is a Compaq Evo and despite it's probable proprietary innards, I want one. It is basic by design with a Celeron 1.4, 256MB of RAM and a 20GB disk but golly it does the Office Suite, email and the Internet, really, really well.

I said over the last few months that prices have plummeted; storage is cheap, speed is cheap, memory is cheap, everything's cheap except talk. My point is don't put up with an older system for even general use but they're still useful on a home network. Even if you prefer a white box, rather than a purpose built office box, it has to better than a P2-200 something.

Now for some good news on the CD backup front. The next version of CloneCD will be able to defeat SafeDisc v2.80.010 (e.g. Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit) using the usual SafeDisc killer burners from Lite-On, LG (GCE) and ASUS; it will also have a feature to produce working backups in almost the entire range of burners on the street. I tested it using a Ricoh MP7163A and the new feature, quite simply, is revolutionary and requires no emulation from DAEMON-Tools for example. Until then, read an image to disk using DiscDump and burn with FireBurner. The latest release of Blindwrite (from v4.2.1 actually) will produce a working backup of not only SD2.8x but SecuROM v4.x protected discs as well (e.g. UT2K3) whereas the others simply can't do it: CloneCD - no way yet but planned and with support to defeat ProtectCD 5 as well, and Alcohol 120% can emulate only. Other replication and mastering suites are noticeably lagging. Interestingly, Nero and DiscJuggler will do a job on SafeDisc 2 with the right burner, one capable of "correct EFM encoding of regular bit patterns", but that's another story.

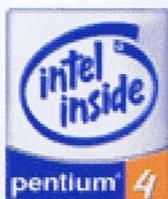
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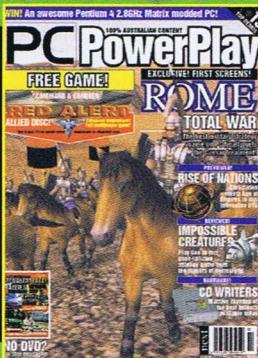
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PCPP #80

The fortuitous winners of the 120GB Seagate HDD were Liam O'Sullivan, Cannon Hill QLD; Scott Miller, Kaleen ACT; Richard Allen, Middle Park VIC; Steven Karas, Blakehurst NSW; Stan Mills, Lightning Ridge, NSW. Congrats!



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WWW.RPGDOT.COM - 92% "This game is fun. This game is addicting. What more needs to be said?"

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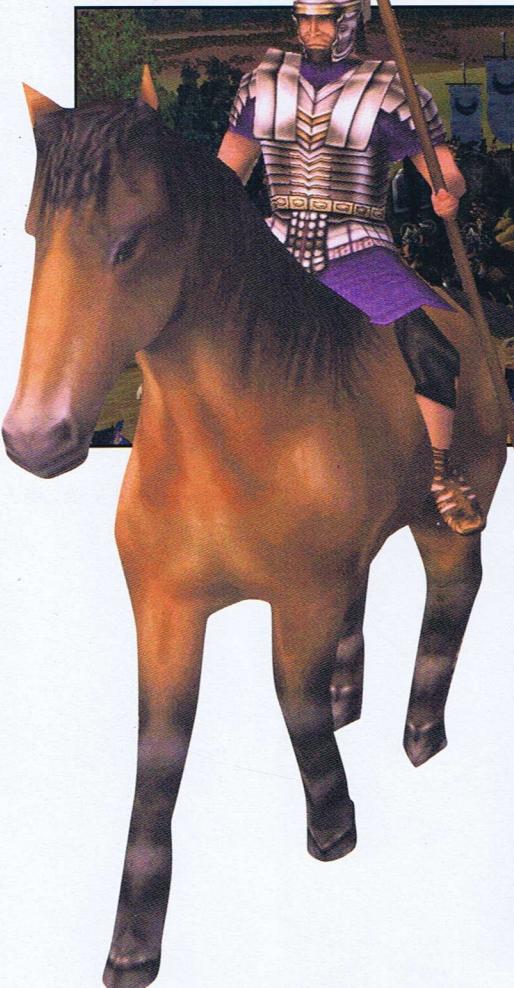
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IN PREVIEW

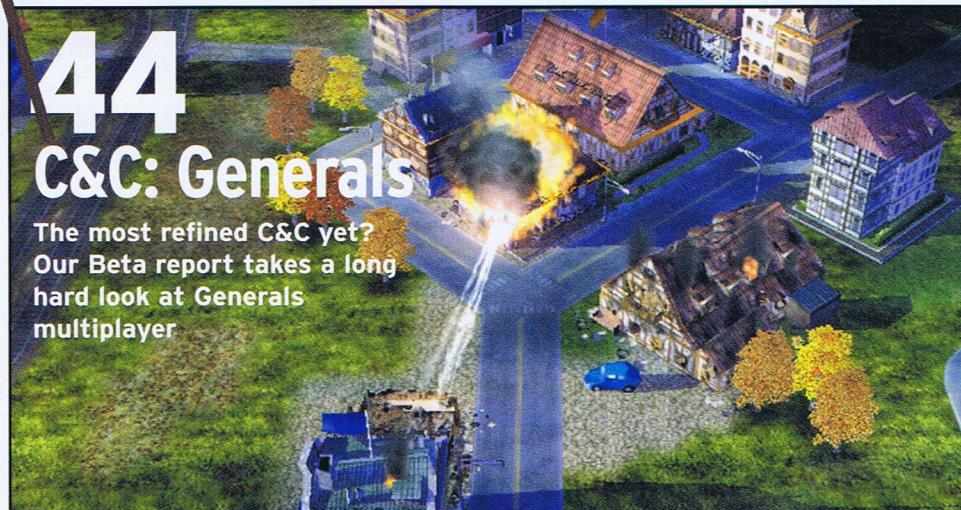
THEY GAVE US THE CODE, WE GIVE YOU THE LOWDOWN



40

Rome Total War

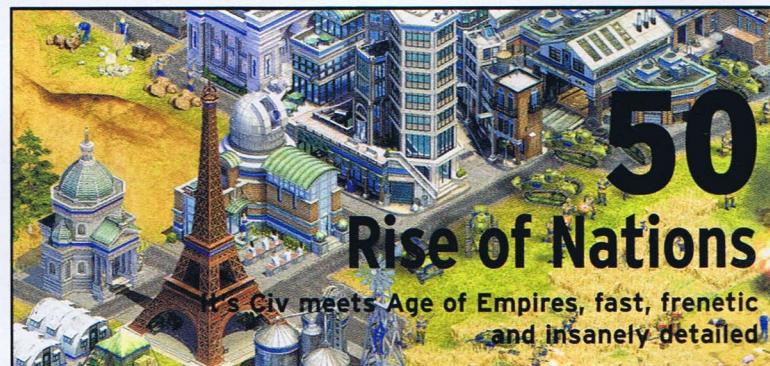
It's the future of military strategy on the PC - 5000 motion captured units on the field at once, and Caesar is one of them



44

C&C: Generals

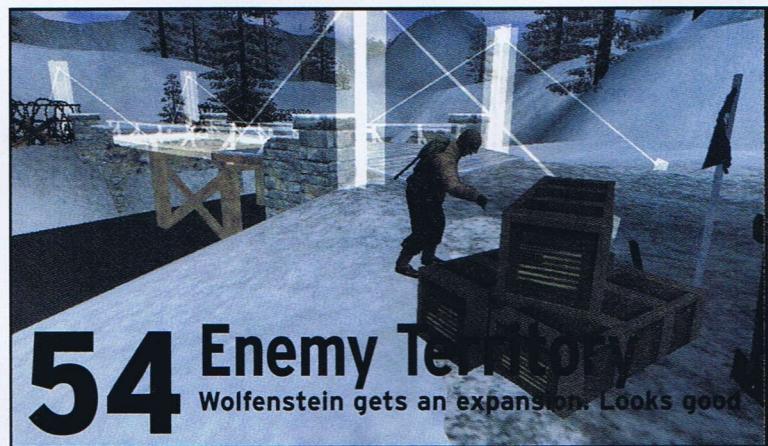
The most refined C&C yet? Our Beta report takes a long hard look at Generals multiplayer



50

Rise of Nations

It's Civ meets Age of Empires, fast, frenetic and insanely detailed



54

Enemy Territory

Wolfenstein gets an expansion. Looks good

This is definitely strategy month, at least as far as previews go. It all started when Creative Assembly dropped us a line to let us know that the next in their Total War series was well under way. Rome: Total War brings full 3D to this massive-scale military strategy game, and it looks damnably impressive.

Also on the cards is C&C Generals. We've finally got our hands on some multiplayer code, and Jere spent many a less-than-lonely evening fighting it out on the digital battlefields of Westwood Online to get a painfully detailed sense of what this spectacular RTS is going to be all about.

Continuing in our strategy vein, we've got code for Rise of Nations. This one hasn't received that much coverage so far, but this marks a dramatic change. Imagine the detail of Civilization blended expertly with the speed and immediacy of Age of Empires, and you've got Rise of Nations. It fast, it's furious, it's stupendously detailed and if we're lucky it will give us the game that Empire Earth should have been.

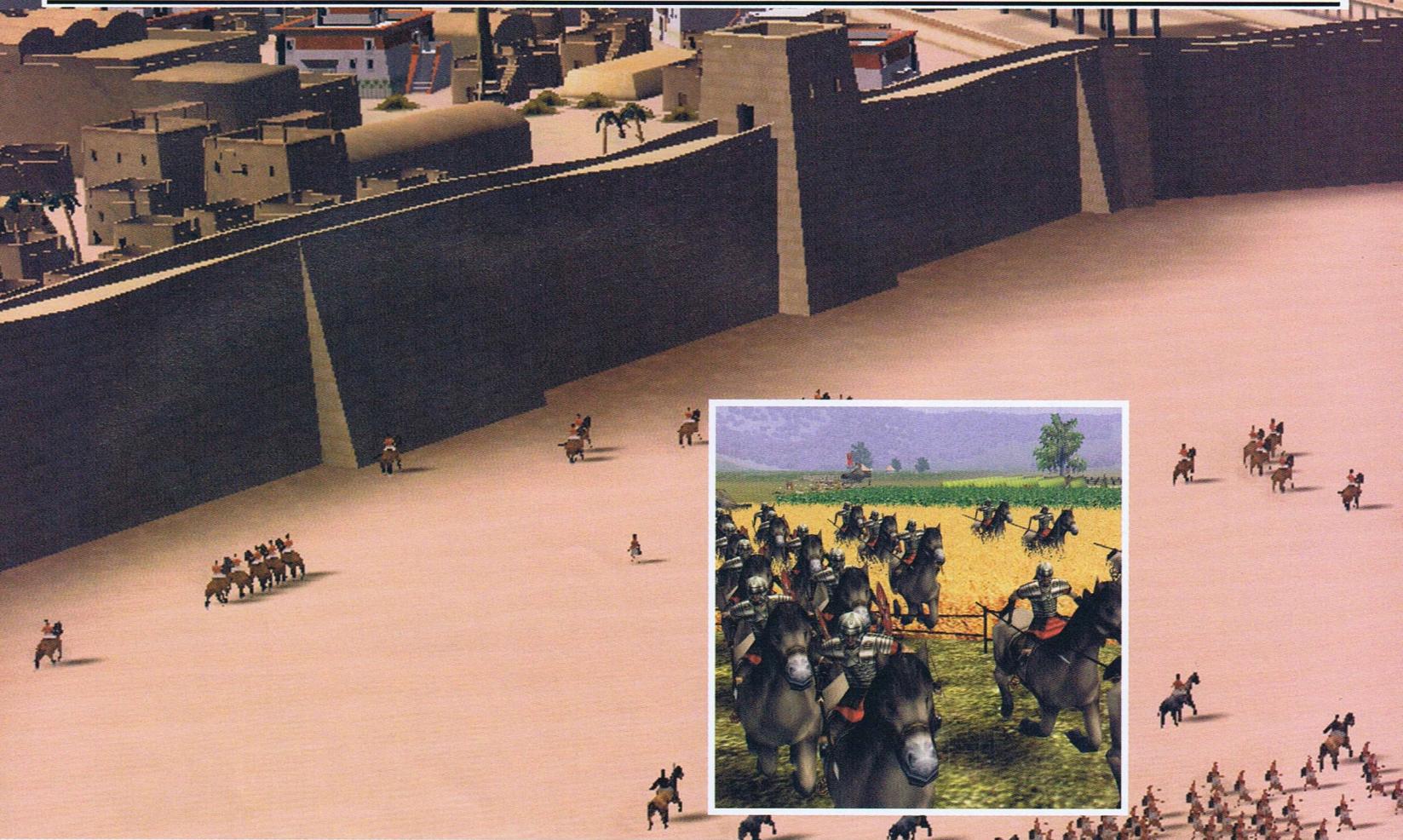
Also this month we take a look at the expected but surprising expansion to Return to Castle Wolfenstein. Expected because of course a game of this stature was going to get an expansion pack, and surprising because of the way it's been designed. Rather than a series of add-on levels for RTCW with a couple of extra weapons, the team is going in an entirely new direction, with squad-based missions in a variety of styles, kind of like an FPS version of Commandos 2. And the multiplayer! But I've said too much - flip to p54 for more details.

It's a strong lineup of games this month, which makes me very excited about the potential for the first half of 2002. With the likes of these in our libraries, we should be well equipped to survive the inevitable drought that hits around about April-May, and get our gaming appetites back in time for the second wave of quality releases in August. Ah my gaming calendar, what a complex yet rewarding beast it is!

Justin Hoffman
letters@pcpowerplay.com.au

ROME

DEVELOPER-CREATIVE ASSEMBLY · PUBLISHER-ACTIVISION · DISTRIBUTOR-ACTIVISION · DUE-Q2 2003

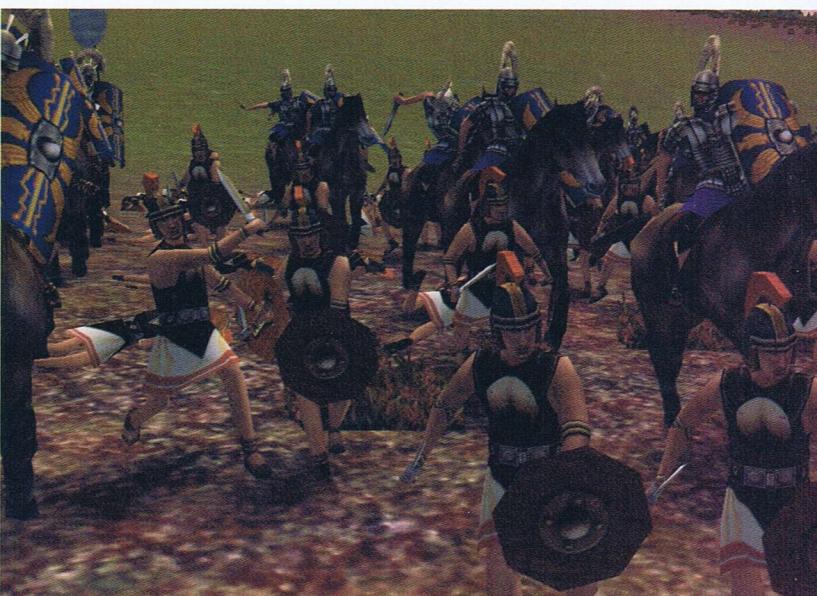


The problem with RTS is one of scale. No matter how clever the build-queue, how superlative the upgrades or how insanely detailed the 3D character models, in standard RTS there are only ever fifty or so units on the field of battle at any one time. Not only that, the nature of the 'build your base anew every mission' structure - to take the example of Starcraft - means that the Imperial capital of the galaxy looks pretty much the same as the forward scout base from three missions ago. The scale is always small, skirmish-based and anything but epic.

Luckily for those gamers who crave big battles, Creative Assembly has been dependably releasing new versions of its Total War series every year. They began with Shogun: Total War, set in feudal Japan and featuring not dozens but hundreds of units on

the field at once, moving in great elegant formations, charging, retreating and cutting great swathes in the enemy flank. In 2002 the developer released Medieval: Total War, bringing those familiar knights, crossbowmen and pike-wielding peasants to the expansive battlefields of the Middle Ages. This time, there weren't just hundreds of units on the field, there were thousands.

And yet, both these Total War games had to make sacrifices to get the sheer volume of troops moving at a decent framerate. In an age of 3D modelling, the Total War games used sprite-based units on their 3D maps. Because there were so many, the visual impact wasn't too dramatic, but all the while we were hacking our way through middle Europe, there was always that little niggling doubt - if only this game was fully 3D.





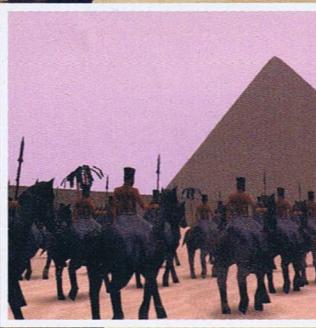
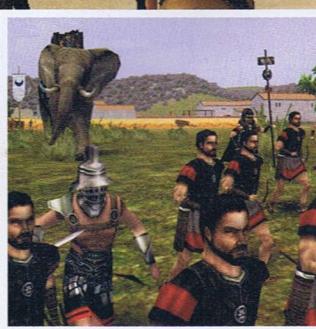
TOTAL WAR



ET TU BRUTE?

In 2002, we were almost swamped by World War 2 titles. Will 2003 be the Year of the Roman Military Game? So far on the drawing board we have the RTS Praetorians (previewed this issue) and the shelves are even now graced with the somewhat limited likes of Legion, and don't forget the platinum versions of the various Caesar city-management games.

Other Roman possibilities are almost limitless: Gladiator: The Cheap 3D Platformer Movie Knockoff seems surprisingly absent, while WWE: Spartacus Wrestling seems obvious. And it would be a stunning victory for gaming's gay counterculture if they could get their hands on Ben Hur: The Game. Oh Charleton, you're so butch.



RENDER UNTO CAESAR

Enter Rome: Total War, the latest instalment from Creative Assembly. While there are a number of Rome-based strategy games expected in 2003, none of them look like this. For the first time, a Total War game will be rendered completely in 3D. Every one of the 5000 troops on the field is a motion-captured 3D model, with a full set of attack, movement and death animations. Clever programming means this new iteration of the Total War engine actually runs FASTER than Medieval: Total War, uses less texture memory, and places fewer demands on your system.

That said, if you have the PCPP Beast (or a near equivalent) the game will also take full advantage of vertex- and pixel-shaders, display a high-detailed and accurate night sky, generate the full gamut of weather effects and display objects on the battlefield up to the scale equivalent of 32

kilometres away - a pretty decent distance even in the real world.

Even more cause for excitement are the cities. Rome: Total War will be able to generate entire ancient cities to scale, and troops will be able to enter these cities and take the fight to the streets. Garrison buildings, set ambushes at important access points, the inclusion of cities adds a whole new tactical aspect to the game.

WHEN IN ROME

The title of Creative Assembly's new game is fairly self-explanatory. From 200BC until 500AD the undisputed superpower in Mediterranean Europe, Asia and North Africa was Rome. Under the rule of this single city, the whole Mediterranean region was united (however sketchily) for the first and only time in history. Rome's economic and military power remained unchallenged for hundreds of years until the Republic became the

Empire and - a little like the British more than a millennium later - eventually collapsed under its own administrative weight.

Rome's power, especially in its earlier history, was the sword. The Romans were among the first European peoples to use disciplined, ordered armies and unlike the Greeks were able to field armies on a massive scale. No culture in southern Europe was able to stop resist them, and the Parthians in the Middle-East were unable to conquer them. To this day, Rome carries an aura of being some kind of perfect military ideal, which of course makes Rome the perfect subject for a military simulator.

Where Medieval: Total War could be (a little unkindly) described as little more than a Shogun total conversion with a bit of an engine update, Rome: Total War is both a sequel and a successor. Everything has changed, and for the better.

For a start, the Risk-style

regional strategic map used in the Campaign mode has been discarded. Instead of controlling territories, the player is now responsible for a much more fluid living world. There are no artificial lines on the board anymore, just the natural barriers thrown up by rivers, mountains and oceans. Players will be able to watch cities grow and expand, make Civ-style improvements to their provinces and watch their people prosper.

This development on the campaign map will translate directly into the tactical battles. If the player has developed agriculture in a region, a battle in that region will be fought among the wheat fields. If there are roads and aqueducts, these will also appear. All these improvements will be fully destructible in battle, so it will be possible to specifically target certain aspects of an enemy's infrastructure, rather than just taking over his province wholesale.

In keeping with this freer game



TOTAL WAR: TOTAL WAR

The main text of this preview sends Creative Assembly at least one heavy handed hint about Total War games beyond Rome. A British Empire game would be nothing short of spectacular, thanks to the wide variety of potential battlefields, the huge numbers of enemies and the range of military equipment. It could even culminate in World War I, with battles the likes of which have never been simulated on the PC. But what other possibilities exist?

ISLAM: TOTAL WAR

Beginning with Mohammed's own military victories against Medina and Mecca, all the way up to the Islamic campaigns in Christendom, their conquest of the Iberian peninsula and their extensive operations in Africa. The weapons and strategies would be new to most players, as Islam is a culture seldom represented as a military power on PC or in other entertainment media.

TAIPEI: TOTAL WAR

Similar to Shogun yes, but also refreshingly different as it would operate on a much larger scale. This examination of Chinese military history could begin with the British incursions in the Middle Kingdom, and culminate in the enormously destructive military campaigns of the Taiping rebels against the Manchurian aristocracy. Mongolian mercenaries versus British gunboats! What could be tastier!

CATAPULTS ARE NOW EVEN MORE SPECTACULARLY DESTRUCTIVE THANKS TO THE NEW 3D ENGINE

model, it will now be possible to move armies on the campaign map at will, into enemy-held areas, and choose specific points as the field of combat. Mountain passes, vulnerable port cities, valuable resource regions can be targeted specifically making for a more realistic and dynamic campaign experience.

THE GREAT CITY

Creative Assembly has also placed much emphasis on city assaults in Rome: Total War. Cities no longer consist of a couple of buildings circled around by a few walls, cities are now enormous sprawling metropolises, modelled as they would have appeared in Rome's heyday, with hundreds of buildings, temples, government structures, amphitheatres, aqueducts and complex and extensive defensive structures such as walls and towers.

Rome itself will appear in the game, and the player will be able to

defend it against barbarian invasion, or even take the reigns of Hannibal's famous Carthaginian battle elephants in an attempt to play out the First Punic War.

There will be numerous special units available to use against cities, including siege towers of course, built on a scale never seen before. Battering rams and siege engines such as catapults will also make a return, now even more spectacularly destructive thanks to the 3D engine updates. It will also be possible to use sappers to dig out the foundations of city walls and collapse them in on themselves.

On the defensive side of city assaults, it will now be possible to position troops on the battlements, in towers and inside buildings to gain defensive bonuses against invaders. Street-to-street battles will also take place, modelling an essential part of Roman-era conflict – the sacking of rebellious cities.

The aim of Rome: Total War is

simple: win battles, serve the Senate, increase your public standing and eventually be proclaimed Imperator. There will be a complex diplomacy module to the game where it will be possible to trade resources and units, and create alliances and treaties. This will prove particularly welcome in multiplayer, which supports up to 8 players in a single campaign.

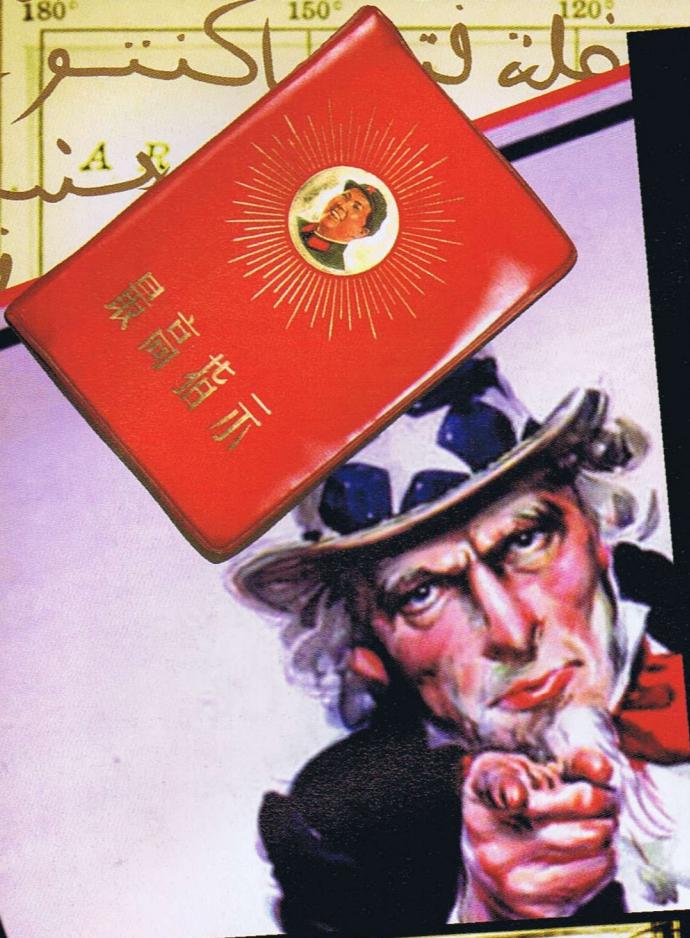
The Senate will also make an appearance in the game, and its role and influence will wax and wane according to the historical peculiarities of the time. Early in the Roman era, the Senate will more or less run the show, and dictate to the player when and where they must act, provide precise objective and reward or punish the player accordingly. Later, as the player's influence over the army grows, the power of the Senate will fade until the Senate will be begging for assistance or mercy and the player

is in the perfect position to demand to be elected Dictator and thus, in fact if not in name, become Emperor of Rome.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

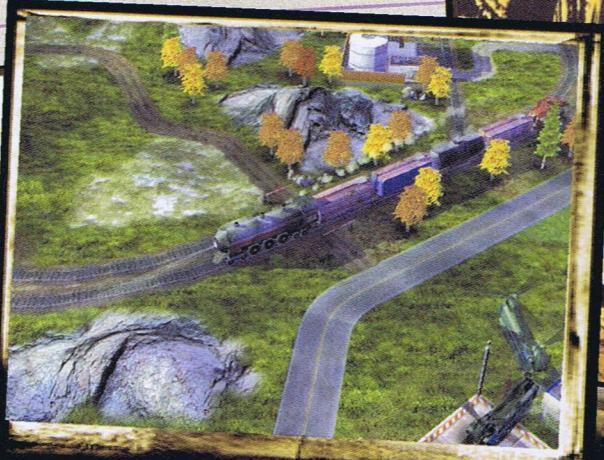
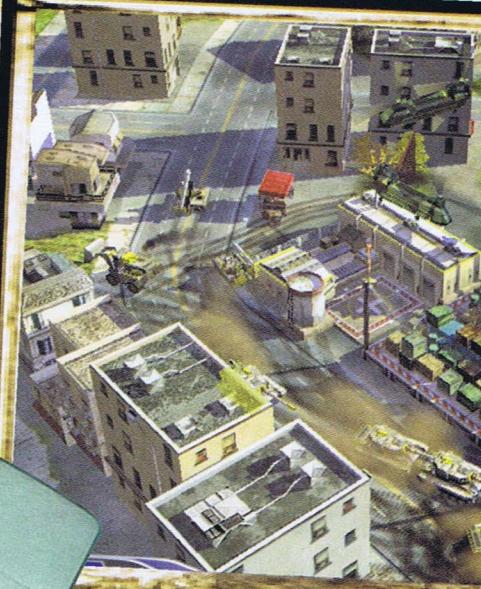
If Rome: Total War has core gameplay as good as Medieval: Total War, and if the new 3D engine really works effectively on a range of systems, if the promise of large-scale city assaults is made good and if the politics and intrigue of the Romans is modelled effectively, then Rome: Total War will surely confirm Creative Assembly's title as the kings of hardcore military strategy on the PC. Bring on Rome: Total War, because if we're very very good and buy lots of copies, we may just be able to expect the surely inevitable and very exciting sequel, British Empire: Total War. Now that would be something.

ANTHONY FORDHAM



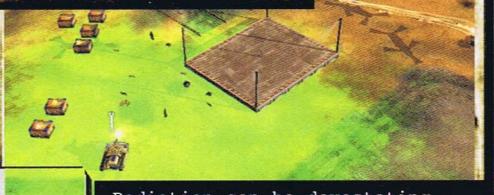
COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS

Very few games can lay claim to the fact that they birthed an entirely new genre. Dune 2 by Westwood was the first commercially successful initiation of real time strategy and was directly responsible for the creation of Command and Conquer which brought RTS to the masses. One highly successful franchise later the dev team are ready to reignite the faltering RTS flame with a completely redesigned game and a shiny new 3D engine. We sent Jere Lawrence to investigate this new RTS utopia - he didn't want to come home.



台湾统一祖国的神圣事业

COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS



- Brief overview of The GLA
- Does not require any type of power at all
- AK-47 toting angry mobs and suicide units
- Stinger sites are devastating against airborne units
- Tunnels allow for extremely sneaky tactics as they can deliver death anywhere
- Chemical sprayers will clear out occupied buildings
- Scuds: Devastating as they leave chemical residue that continues to destroy buildings and ALL units.
- Can salvage wreckage for money and parts from enemy tanks.
- Jarmon Kell can steal enemy vehicles including bulldozers that would allow you to build your opponent's units.

No more Tiberian

Potentially the biggest change is that Tiberian collection is no more which is worth much rejoicing. Finally, no longer will harvesters stupidly trundle into an enemy base, nor will you need to break into fits of swearing as the stupid AI wanders off to collect Tiberian from the furthest point on the map despite there being a rich deposit right next to it. Instead, there are now fixed location, non regenerating supply depots that either Chinooks (USA), Trucks (China) or peasants (GLA) must travel to, collect a crate, and then return it to a supply depot. A refreshing change, this allows for a mix of great new strategies as well as providing strategic locations to hold and fight over.

Role-play a General

Considering the name of the game was chosen based on this particular aspect it's not hard to deduce that it's a significant feature of Generals which thankfully has been implemented brilliantly. The Generals screen is best described as a "skills tree" and the way it works will be instantly familiar to RPG'ers. As you destroy units on the battlefield experience is rewarded to a pool and once the experience bar is full you increase in level and

Perhaps in the future the popularity of a game won't be measured initially in terms of sales, but rather in lost productivity. The reason for the seemingly strange latter sentence was because of a department wide email within IBM that was circulated the day after Tiberian Sun was released. The email commented that the number of people who took the day of sick to play a computer game was highly inappropriate. Large multi-nationals had better start preparing themselves then because Generals is so compelling that gamers will want to be taking a whole week off their boring office jobs to play it, not just a day.

C&C Generals represents a redefinition of the C&C universe that improves the franchise greatly and is looking to be one of the best in the series. This was quite a surprise, particularly after the severe problems that made the online play in Yuri's Revenge (YR) the shemozzle it was - too imbalanced with Yuri and France being in-proportionately harder than the other sides. Obviously the Westwood team (now absorbed into EA and called EA Pacific) has learnt a great deal from this because Generals is the most balanced game they've produced.

So many changes

Change, they say, is as a good as a holiday so with that analogy in mind Generals should be considered not so much a trip up the coast, but rather a six month comprehensive round the world trek. Construction yards are the first to go which are replaced by bulldozers. This is actually a vast improvement because rushers who go straight for the construction yard to end the game in the first 3 minutes have had all their thunder stolen from them. Replacing the construction yard is the command centre which is supposed to house your General. Despite the Generals team stating that the General NPC must be protected, in the beta you become the General instead and there is no NPC. It is still speculative whether this will remain the same or if an NPC will be added (possibly for the single player component) before release.

Where's that war factory?

Bulldozers ultimately change some previously set in stone fundamentals regarding the C&C universe. You can now build any structure, anywhere on the map and with multiple bulldozers it's possible to be building multiple bases simultaneously. The detrimental side to this is that the

build interface which has always featured on the side is now located on the bottom and is context sensitive to the building you have clicked. Click on the Command Centre and you can build another bulldozer, click on a war factory and the interface changes to show vehicles that can be built, click on the bulldozer and the interface changes to show all the structures it can build. Although the bulldozers are great, the new interface is cumbersome. Previously, every unit and every building was available from a convenient mouse wheel scrollable list but now you need to know what each building can produce and click it each time you want to build that particular unit. As the battle rages on and the game becomes more hectic it can be frustrating having to constantly traverse the map to find structure X to produce unit Y.

In order to tighten up bases, the mostly superfluous service centre is no more and now, to repair a vehicle you send it back to the war factory or to heal infantry send them to their barracks for a rest. Another welcome, gameplay enhancing addition.



receive a number of skill points which can be used to activate different super attacks.

Although a General has five levels, skills are only available at Levels 1, 3 and 5 and the Generals skills all radically differ based on country but the number of skills between them is the same. At level one there are three skills that can be activated, Level three has nine skills to choose from and level five has one SUPER skill. There are so many niceties to the Generals system that it's hard to imagine any future RTS without it and is far superior to the RPG implementation that Warcraft III uses. Mainly it stops turtling (or base whoring to use another term), a process where players will build their base and fortify it with numerous turrets and never venture outside. If this kind of scenario occurred in Generals the other player needs only to do minimal damage to the base or destroy the opponents' resource collectors to earn enough experience to access a devastating attack such as an A-10 strike for the US, a truck loaded mini-nuke for China or an Anthrax attack for the GLA (to just name a small few).

Different Sides

Something that C&C fans have long desired is the simple principle of a balanced game. In the original C&C

Nod was overpowered and in Tiberian Sun GDI had the advantage. As for Red Alert 2 we've already mentioned the completely unbalanced and overpowered Yuri. The team behind Generals are the same group responsible for RA2/YR and in Generals they've certainly redeemed themselves as balance so far is excellent. Your units are all tough enough that you never feel cheated by an overpowered side but rather have to use tactics and the geography of the map to your advantage.

USA

For C&C veterans the USA is going to feel the most familiar as its units and infantry is similar to that of the GDI. The USA is the most technologically advanced but also the most expensive so this factor balances out well. Intelligence is another USA bonus and they start the game with the map fully revealed, fog of war the only protection for the enemy. Later, the US gets spies that can be activated once every five minutes and display the location of every enemy unit.

Resources

For resource collection the US uses Chinook helicopters to gather supplies and can capably collect a lot of the resources on a map which is necessary to be able to afford

expensive units. This doesn't dramatically affect players using another side because their units are cheaper and therefore more hardware can be built from a lesser collection of resources. Chinooks also double as troop transports and can hold a number of soldiers that can be deposited to defend

resources and once supplies on a map have dried up, can be used as base invading troop transports.

Actually, the Chinook considering that it's essentially an "ore truck" is extremely versatile. When loaded with troops, it's possible to drop them from a suspension line (which looks incredibly cool) to completely clear a building of enemy soldiers which then becomes captured by your Rangers.

Vehicles

US vehicles are strong but relatively slow, except for the Humvees which zip around. As high tech and high expense is the theme of the US, the cost of a powerful unit is well dispersed. The Humvee for example starts off as a standard vehicle with a machine gun but as it can hold 5 soldiers can be upgraded with men that can all fire from the inside. Filling a Humvee with five rocket troops is devastating but as Humvee armour is so weak, you're essentially paying top dollar for a

Brief overview of China

- > The more units that are grouped together, the stronger they become.
- > Red Guard troop transports are a tough force to counter
- > Hackers make money and Black Lotus; she will own you
- > Mines can be released from each building including turrets and bunkers and allows you to stop Ranger Chinook combat drops/GLA rushes
- > Nukes are awesome and leave a nice residue that continuously destroys
- > Upgraded Overlords are so strong the ground trembles when they move in formation

Quick facts about Generals

- > The team who made Red Alert 2 and Yuri's Revenge are responsible for Generals but are now called EA Pacific.
- > The game is purported to cost between \$10 million and \$12 million to produce.
- > Work on Generals started after Red Alert 2 shipped in late 2000
- > Three distinct sides are featured in the game, with 10 single player missions per side
- > At first, the team considered using the Quake, Unreal or LithTech engine
- > After September 11, the team re-evaluated whether it wanted to create a modern-warfare title
- > The Sage 3D game engine created for Generals has been given to Westwood for an upcoming product

vehicle with a lot of firepower, but not much armour.

The main tank is the Crusader which is well armed and does excellent damage but you certainly can't be victorious producing masses of just tanks because artillery and aircraft can destroy them very quickly. Thus they need the support of bazooka equipped (i.e. anti-air) Humvees and more importantly the help of long range backup. The US long range weapon is a vehicle that carries an unlimited supply of Tomahawk missiles. Although this unit has paper thin armour its long range makes it extremely devastating. This aspect of having to use unit types to support each other is excellent and makes for a much more interesting game. The best tactic so far is to use a row of tanks to create a wall between you and the enemy with Humvees flanking the sides and Tomahawk launchers bombarding the enemy from the furthest distance they can.

COMMAND & CONQUER GENERALS



Take that, double-parkers!

Brief overview of USA

- > Awesome intelligence - you can see the whole map right from the beginning of the game and the predator drones are awesome.
- > Though the Orbital Laser is relatively weak it can help cut through the heart of a Chinese tank rush or a massive GLA mob rush.
- > Aurora bombers can take out a building with one strike though they may not make it home as after weapons release their speed is cut in half.
- > Pathfinders are stealth snipers that are very effective, upgrades on tanks are a must
- > Very powerful strategy centre.

which are excellent against troops and armour can be built in large numbers if you can afford them.

China

The principle behind China is that of expansion, mass production and overwhelming the enemy with large numbers. This is achieved by increasing the firing rates of grouped units (vehicles and infantry) in close proximity but you need at least five units. When building infantry, China also receives a "two for one" bonus where you pay for one unit of infantry but receive two. Handy when under attack and need help fast.

China is also about high tech espionage and "hacking". Hackers when built can be deployed around your base (it's rather amusing in that they all sit cross legged on the ground with little laptops) to steal money "from the Internet" which allows for supply-free income generation. Black Lotus is the

heroine of the hackers and is an extremely powerful unit that the majority of the MP Testers haven't utilised to their fullest yet. She is unarmed but remains invisible to the enemy until she performs a task such as stealing credits from enemy Supply Depots, hacking into enemy buildings to take them over and hacking vehicles to disable them for a short time.

Resources

The Chinese collect resources using slow trucks that aren't armoured very well but their units and structures are a lot cheaper which balances this out. The standard Chinese tactic so far is to take as many supply posts as possible and then build masses of defences to hold each area. This ability to spread out means that Chinese tactics tend to consist of multiple bases that good players quickly turn to their advantage.

Vehicles

Chinese vehicles are interesting in that the theme behind them is fire. The Dragon Tank lets loose with a massive jet of flame that is delightfully effective on buildings and infantry and can create a wall of fire in front of units to defend them. The Battle Master is a standard tank comparable to the USA Crusader and is equally vulnerable to air

attacks so needs backup from the anti-air, anti-infantry Gattling Tank. Their long range weapon is the Inferno cannon, a lightly armed artillery vehicle with shells that explode in a ball of flame for excellent area effect damage.

The most interesting Chinese unit though is the Overlord. This massive twin barrel tank is huge but a little frustrating because of its slow speed which makes it vulnerable to long range attacks and fast GLA raids. To compensate for the slow speed, Overlords can have small buildings attached to them: a bunker that can hold infantry, a Gattling tower for anti air capability and the most amusing structure of the Chinese; a propaganda tower that heals all units in the vicinity. The Air Force consists of Migs only which drop napalm (that fire Motif again) and although at first they are relatively weak, when they get their group bonus they can do tremendous damage to both structures and units.

The most damaging super weapon in the game, the Nuke, belongs to China and can devastate a screens worth of buildings. For this reason, when competing against an opponent playing China, your base should be spread out as much as possible so that super weapons do minimal damage.



GLA

The terrorists in Generals are called the GLA (Global Liberation Army) and do rather skirt on the edges of tastelessness. This is mainly due to their use of suicide bombers and suicide trucks which might upset Israelis or those affected by the Bali bombing. Aside from unfortunate real-world similarities, the GLA is basically the very fast, Zerg like rush team. The first advantage is that the GLA do not use power nor need bulldozers so can begin production immediately and never need to worry about failing turrets due to low power.

The way the GLA gather resources and build up is with peasants that are very much like the peons from Warcraft. These guys can make structures, collect supplies and illicit a smile. To the credit of the dev team a lot of the potentially offensive nature of the GLA has been softened a tad through the use of humour. Peasants for example when not carrying something will respectfully follow your orders but ask them to build a structure holding a crate of supplies and they will complain all the way. "My back hurts" and "Oh the suffering" are just some of the amusing quips they pop out.

The units of the GLA have extremely light armour but are very

fast and may need a small element of nerfage as their speed is devastating, especially against the Chinese. The Rocket buggy in particular is very fast and has a range just outside of most tanks. This means that used properly, a GLA player can burn in, destroy a unit and return into the fog of war to hide and do it all over again. It's these kinds of sneaky tactics that defines the GLA which can be frustrating to an opponent. A particularly handy unit is Jarmen Kell who can kill the driver of any vehicle so that it can be captured by an enemy driver. The crippling aspect of this is that veteran status in Generals is not tied to the unit, but to the driver. This allows the GLA to snipe away veteran units and significantly weaken their opposition.

Suicide trucks are another useful unit that the enemy can use to keep other players occupied. Ideal for wiping out groups of units and also as a means of distraction the bomb truck can take out tanks and buildings just as easily. The truck can be camouflaged as any opposition unit but is revealed when close to the enemy. The best way to use it is to follow your opponents units from behind and when the convoy stops, greet them with a high explosive gift.

Technical vehicles are interesting in that they can either

Anti cheating code

The following is being done to prevent online cheating:
 There will be a "live team" in place for Generals to fix any problems that may occur post launch
 An experimental possible anti-cheat system to be implemented into Generals is when you connect with someone the matchmaking service can alert you to what trainers or map hacks the opponent has installed. Other stats will appear in the matchmaking screens which allow the player to select opponents that have had up to a certain number of disconnects, which will in turn allow players not to play others with a higher number of disconnects

scavenge the burnt wrecks of enemy units for instant money or pick up a weapon from a burnt wreck such as a tank barrel. There's also angry mobs that are quite effective also provide some comic relief. Although built as a single unit, the angry mob consists of 20 demonstrating civilians with Molotov cocktails and when upgraded, AK-47s. The humorous aspect of the mob though is in their animation. When unoccupied they stand around, chat with each other, smoke a cigarette, sit down for a rest, and will also just "wander around". When distracted from your base it is amusing to return to it to find your mob people all over the place, smoking, chatting and having a grand old time.

The GLA has no Air Force; instead they further their sneaky tactics by making tunnels which can hold 9 units, vehicle and infantry. You're not bound by entrance and exit tunnels either. To use tunnels you just place the units into the closest one (the entrance) and then choose any other tunnel on the map and click it to release everyone.

Graphics

Visually Generals is already stunning and yet the MP test doesn't feature any of the amazing engine rendered cut scenes that were seen at E3. All the units look great despite Infantry looking a little stick-figure like. The environments that are played on are wonderfully varied and range from snow covered Swiss towns to barren Middle Eastern deserts. The textures are great and all blend seamlessly with the true 3D elevation.

There is also a day and night cycle and the shadows of buildings and units will render appropriate to the time of day. Explosions however are the big clincher and they're stunning in Generals. Rockets feature awesome smoke trails and when exploding light up brilliantly; Tomahawks missiles have excellent exhaust effects and the Chinese nuke is a brilliant graphical sight to observe.

All these amazing effects and brilliant terrains however are going to require a powerful machine. The minimum system for the MP test was a 1 GHz system but realistically you're going to want a 2 GHz+ CPU and a Ti4X00 / Radeon 9X00 for fast, smooth play. If you're an RTS fan, start upgrading now Generals is well worth it.

Jere Lawrence



Rise of Nations

The history of the world in one hour? Go on!

Developer: Big Huge Games ■ **Publisher:** Microsoft ■ **Distributor:** Microsoft ■ **Available:** Early 2003

It seems that endless permutations on the basic RTS formula are possible as the Age Of Empires basic blueprint is taken for another spin around the block with this latest incarnation Rise of Nations. But is it all really that simple? Is Rise of Nations shaping up as another Age style knock off, or is there more to it than that?

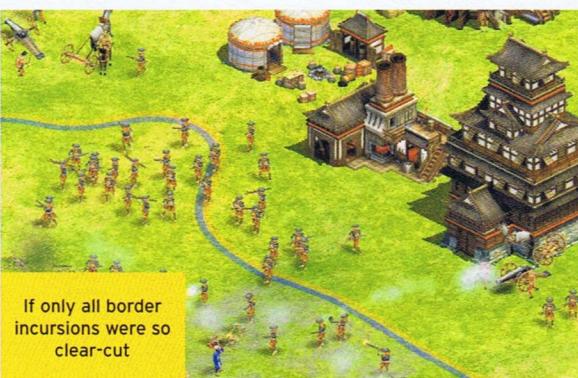
Funny you should ask as we have just spent the last couple of hours absorbed by this game and even though it is very much a case of evolution winning out over revolution, Rise of Nations is very much

the sort of game you'd expect if Age of Empires and Civilization were forcibly bred to create a tasty new hybrid.

The spice still flows

The basic premise of the game seems pretty much like that of every RTS since the Harkonnen crawled out of the primordial ooze and declared war on the Atreides (He's talking about the original Dune 2 - Ed). You must develop superior technology, a more fruitful economy and larger armies than your opponent, then roll

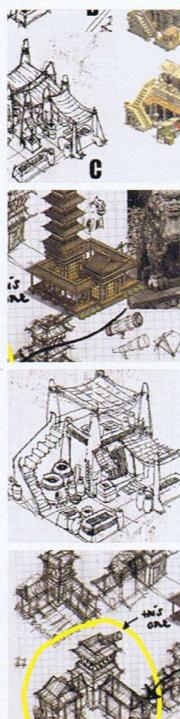
over the top of them like an off-balance sumo wrestler on a wax floor. However there is more to this basic approach in Rise of Nations as the empire management, technology and economic development aspects of the game have been let off their leash and been allowed to develop into a major part of the game.



Rise takes more than a few pages out of the hallowed Civilization III Book Of Game Design. There are many Civ elements, especially on the economic development side of things. The most immediately noticeable of these is the use of player territory. In Rise of Nations you will only be able to build things in areas which are inside your national borders, so it is imperative (as it always is in Civ 3) to push those borders out as far as they can go. Indeed border pushing to gain access to new resources and strategically important areas on the map is a real factor in Rise and will add a lot of fun to the multiplayer game.

Push those city limits

Your borders are determined by a number of factors. Obviously taking land in conquest is the most obvious way you can expand, but it is not the only method your empire can grow. Developing some technologies will also help by making the border-defining power of some of your buildings more significant. For example a fortification extends your borders for a fair distance anyway. With its imposing nature and lots of missile units hiding inside, it is just that sort of building. However if you





research civic improvements some of your buildings (like towns and castles) will have a more pronounced effect on your borders, pushing them out further into enemy territory.

Borders are really the major new evolutionary element in the game (even though we have seen similar things with Empire Earth). In Rise of Nations the borders determine which areas you can gather resources and the borders even have a military effect as troops on foreign soil can suffer from a loss of health just because they are standing on enemy turf. This attrition effect is something you get when you research the right technology and you can also research technology which minimised its effects on your men too. Attrition is quite a neat idea as it gives defenders a chance of repelling overwhelmingly large enemy armies.

Borders are a major new element in the game - troops can even lose health just from standing too long on enemy turf!

Tech Orchard

Technological development is also quite different for a real-time strategy game. Thinking of the tech tree as a single structure really doesn't make sense in this game as the technology can be developed along five different lines and each is pretty much independent of the others. So to continue the metaphor a little more Rise of Nations doesn't really present you with a tech tree, but more of a small orchard with different unrelated areas which you develop.

The divergent technologies which you develop at the Library are broken down into different domains and each has a unique colour code. Red technologies are military in origin, blue technologies are civic

improvements, green related to commerce and yellow enhance your science.

There is also a final improvement which is the traditional 'Age' technology which gives you access to new buildings and units. Each of the other specialised technology paths can be researched independently of era, although you will want to advance in eras as soon as possible as the more modern eras will give you access to a lot of global empire wide improvements.

Blinded by science

Fans of the Civilization model will also note with interest how 'science' is measured in research points is also a resource in itself. You will get a steady

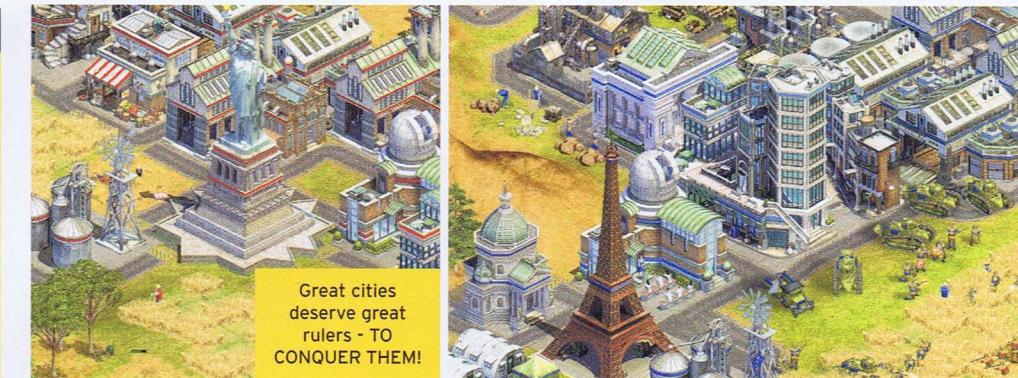
C&C WITH GENERALS

Rise introduces a unique unit type for those familiar with the Age titles. You will be able to create Generals, who while not able to deal much damage themselves, will have a major influence on the game by helping your army in the field. Generals are an essential and initially hard to use unit. You recruit them at your fortification and then they accompany an army in the field and it is their special abilities which will render them an essential part of most armies, especially invading forces. You see Generals can pull some mighty malevolent tricks out of their hats. For a start they will benefit any army they are fighting with by adding to the effectiveness of your force as long as the troops are within the General's command radius. We saw this sort of thing successfully implemented in games like Warlords Battlecry. However the General will also be able to create dummy units which look like your regular army, but have no ability to do damage and have to be attacked by the enemy before they are revealed as fakes, gaining you valuable time to press the attack with your real forces. The General also gives your army the ability to entrench, adding to your defensive ability and you will also be able to conceal units so that they can engage in an ambush on the unsuspecting enemy. There are also spy units which can bribe the enemy too.

flow of science points when you develop buildings like the University, but to maximise this cram the joint full of scholars who will accelerate the science generating power of each campus. You can only build one university for each of your cities too, so the incentive to expand and build as many cities as your empire can support as soon as you can is quite a strong one as you can then steamroll your enemies by literally blinding them with science.

However you have to be careful of how fast you expand as cities which cannot be effectively defended are a real worry as your enemy will be able to take them and then in true Borg fashion assimilate the population with the net effect being that all of your precious resources spent building the city in the first place are wasted.

Capturing cities is a really significant objective in the game and it isn't as easy to do as destroying a city in the Age games has been. This is because



of firstly the aforementioned attrition effect, but also the fact that once defeated a city takes time to become a functional part of your empire and while it is going through the assimilation process, which can take a few agonising minutes the enemy can steal the city back from you if they mount a successful counter-attack.

It is worth taking enemy cities though as your population cap increases, you can add another Wonder to your list of achievements (as there is a limit of usually only one Wonder per city) and most significantly your borders will expand with greater economic development usually being the result.

Get your RRRs moving!

The basic resource model also makes the game more complex as there are more basic resources to keep tabs on. When the game starts out the basic resources are food, wood, metal, wealth and knowledge. Later in the game new resources like oil also come into play and must be included in your economic management and gathering program.

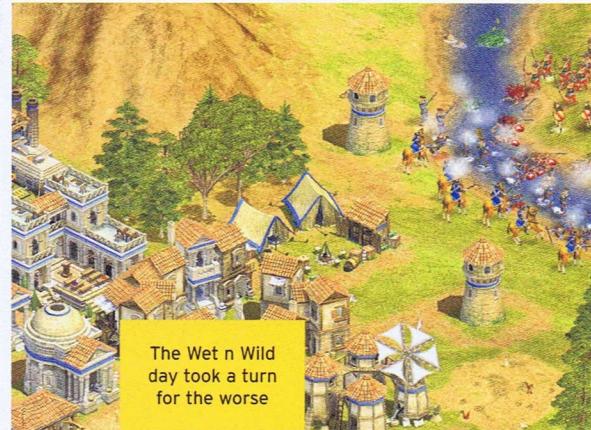
To maximise resource gathering you can build lumber camps, mines and so on, but



you have only limited areas you can do this. For example mines which generate one of the most important resources in the game - metal, can only be built at the bottom of a hill and only one mine per hill is allowed so you have to expand your empire to bring as many possible mine sites inside your borders as possible. The same goes for another basic resource - wood. You can only harvest a certain amount of lumber from a specific area and if you want more you will ultimately need to conquer more territory. There are also unique location specific resources (like sulphur silk etc) which you can claim by recruiting the services of merchants and having them build an outpost - all very Civ eh?

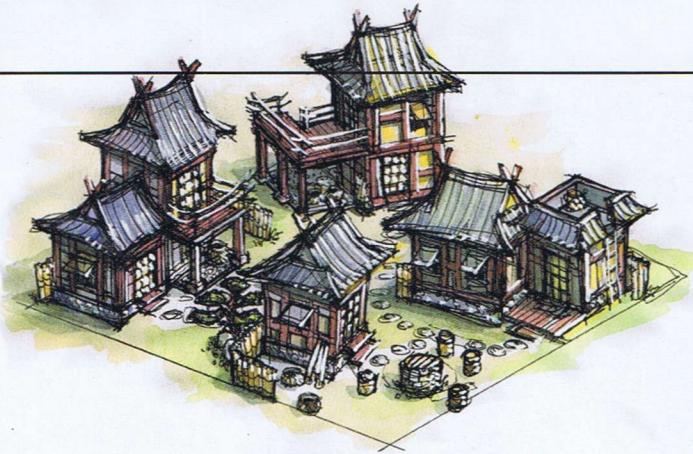
Efficiency is also a major factor in the game as your technologies can make it so you harvest faster, but also can ensure that you waste fewer of the resources you gather. This is an interesting idea as you must constantly retune your technologies so that they are harvesting the optimum amount of a particular resource, spending resources to improve the efficiency of a particular type of mining.

This leads you into the complex economic management model which the



There are so many resources and technologies that you can't make them all a priority - you need to take into account the needs of your civic and military operations





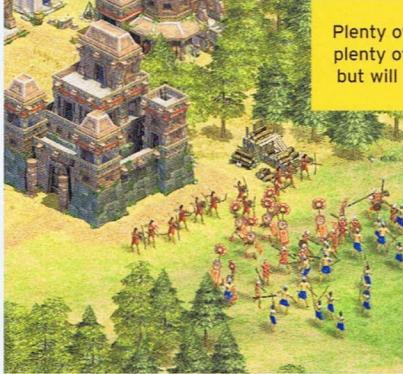
game follows as there are so many resources and technologies that you cannot easily make them all a priority in terms of efficiency. Instead you have to prioritise your resource gathering operation to best take into account the needs of your civic and military operations.

Many Tribes

As you'd expect Rise of Nations lets you play with a dozen or so different races and each has their own unique advantages and limitations. For example the Egyptians can build two Wonders per city

while also being better by ten percent at gathering food at farms. Each tribe also has a gaggle of unique units as well.

Speaking of monuments dedicated to the greatness of your empire, Wonders are many and varied and you can build new ones once you advance to a more modern era. Wonders also have unique effects which help your chaps or hinder the enemy and you have to decide which Wonders are worth pursuing and which



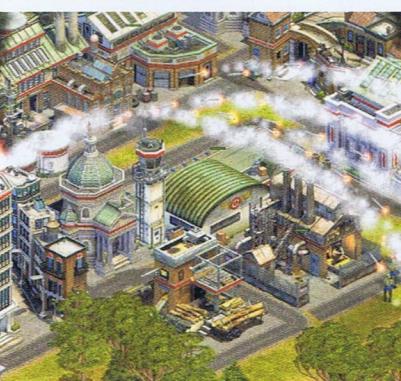
Plenty of variety, plenty of scope - but will it work?



ATTACK OF THE CLONE

We have to admit that the first time we saw this game cynical thoughts of Microsoft squeezing as much value out of their Age series crossed our minds more than once. Indeed to the casual observer the similarities between Rise and Age are very many and very obvious. However this isn't an issue for two reasons. Firstly the gameplay tweaks, with the Civilisation inspired influences, and more empire management elements the game delivers make it a very different play experience, even if the basic appearance of the game looks rather familiar. Secondly if you look at other genres (FPS / RPG or sports games) some of these also look ridiculously similar yet still manage to deliver divergent and entertaining gameplay which isn't noticeable at a glance, but really becomes apparent once you get your hands dirty and get stuck into playing the game. For these reasons we reckon Rise is probably not going to suffer too much even though it is very much inspired by the AOE blueprint.

Multplayer games with 'border pushing' should be particularly enjoyable and certainly Rise looks like delivering a new brand of RTS gameplay encompassing more complex turn based design elements as a part of the RTS model. Balancing these so that you aren't overwhelmed by the game's economic, scientific and military sophistication is the challenge Brian Reynolds and his team must overcome.



Here's hoping it's not another Empire Earth



best suit your overall strategic approach.

On the eye candy side of the equation Rise is neither butt-ugly nor a marvel of modern computer animation. The visuals are indeed not at this stage as full of colour light and animation as Mythology and all the buildings being sprite-based rather than 3D probably has a lot to do with it. The game looks like it uses a revamped version of the old 2.5D Age of Kings engine and this gets the job done fine even if you can't do instant zooms or camera rotations. With Rise it is all about the gameplay and so the average visuals are probably not too much of an issue if you are the sort of hard core RTS player the game is targeted at.

That said this wouldn't be too hard a title to pick up and fiddle with if you don't have experience as there is a very detailed

tutorial section which runs you through half a dozen or so scenarios, with the first missions being so basic they teach real novices how to point and click, select buildings and control the basic movement of units. Thankfully you can skip these should you find them too backward.

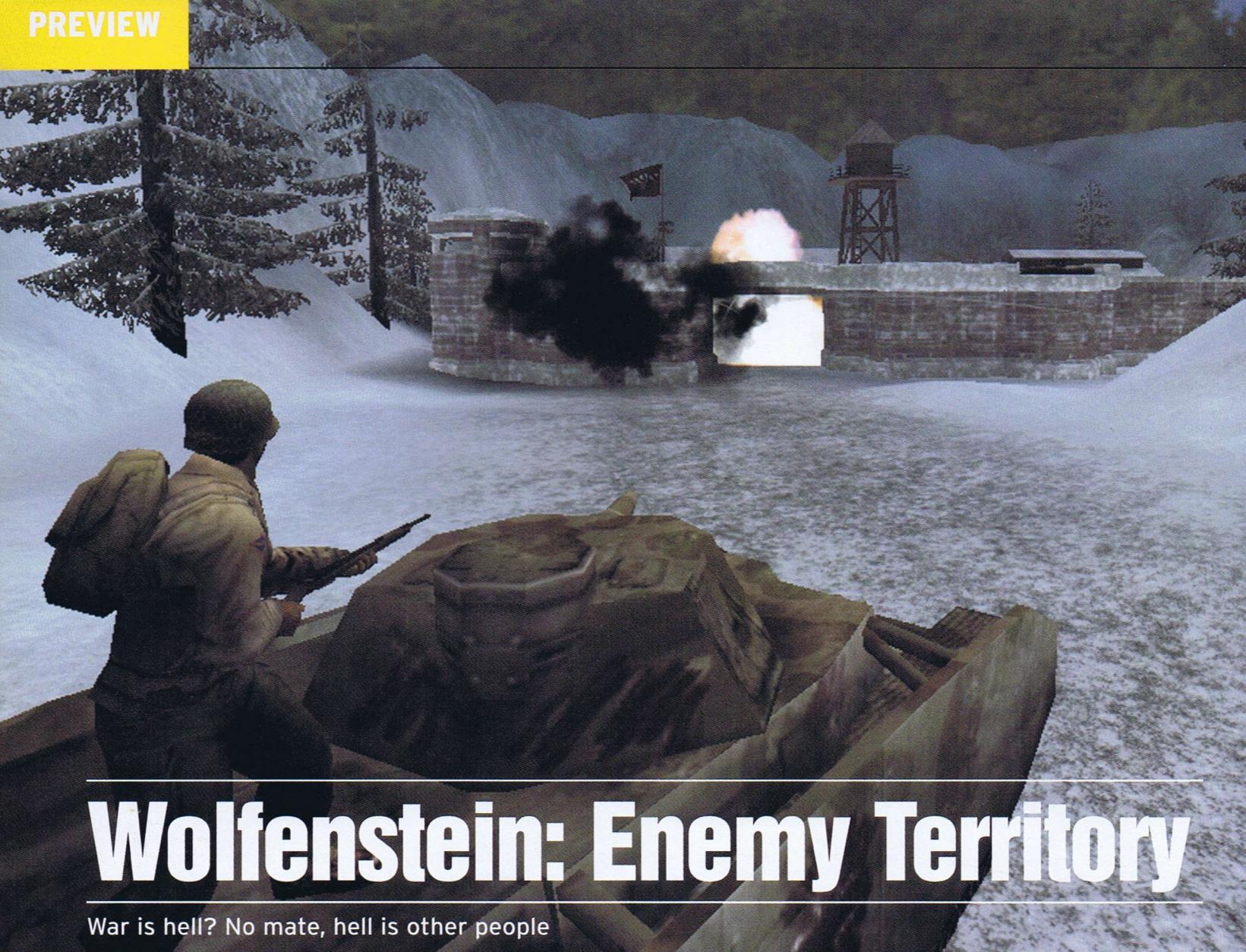
Troops for all

The basic unit types follow the established AOE cannon with cavalry, footsloggers, basic missile units and siege weapons. Later in the game naval and air units also make an appearance with the other ground units evolving with the era. You'll eventually have different types of tanks and infantry too. Those familiar with the series won't find the paper/rock/scissors approach to combat too hard to get the hang of with some unit types being better suited to fighting a specific enemy and being weak against another different type of foe. The units are more detailed and better animated than the most recent game to use this basic engine, the Star Wars RTS Galactic Battlegrounds.

Having mastered the tech tree, gotten a feel for the units and learned the basics of empire building at this stage it is clear that the in game AI has a long way to go as it is too easy to smash the CPU controlled civilisations back into the stone age with a few determined attacks. That said with the amount of depth Rise of Nations delivers, and having seen other games in the Age series which could be quite difficult when the challenge level was turned up to the max it is obvious that this is a game which should be mighty full of conundrums and absorbing gameplay.

The real question is whether the action will be properly balanced so that your empire won't run off the rails in terms of its economic and social development if you are busy fighting a war. Certainly at the moment the sheer amount of stuff you have to do in the game means the potential for overload is there. That said this is the sort of game which experienced RTS players have been craving. But Rise of Nations may go to show that sometimes you have to be careful what you wish for.

Steve Polak



Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory

War is hell? No mate, hell is other people

Developer: Mad Doc / id Software (consulting) ■ **Publisher:** Activision ■ **Distributor:** Activision ■ **Available:** Q1 2002

Wolfenstein has been one of the great underappreciated games of history. Everybody but everybody remembers where they first saw Doom, but only the insanely hardcore or programming geeks remember Wolfenstein 3D with any real degree of fondness. And yet this little game, initially distributed through the Apogee shareware network and on isolated BBSs, pioneered the binary space partition and much of the technology that eventually created Doom.

Last year, id Software and Nerve kicked off the inevitable remake movement with a re-release of Wolfenstein in all its Quake 3 engine powered beauty. Unfortunately, at least for this reviewer, Return to Castle Wolfenstein almost completely failed to recapture the feeling of the original, despite having immeasurably superior graphics. This was primarily because the game seemed to focus more on gimmicky Nazi sci-fi and less on tense action, although the 3D engine's inability to generate serious numbers of enemies probably had a lot to do with this.

However, RTCW did have an impressive multiplayer mode with different player classes, a variety of objectives in multiplayer maps and a real sense of WW2 team-based combat. Which is why the return to Return to Castle Wolfenstein, subtitled Enemy Territory, focuses entirely on team-based play.

Brave Brand of Britishers

Enemy Territory will contain substantial single- and multiplayer modes. Although details on the storyline are sketchy, it would appear that Enemy Territory is in fact a prequel to RTCW, where a young Army Ranger called B J Blazkowicz, after carving a bloody swathe across occupied Europe in the early months of 1942, comes to the attention of the Office of Secret Actions. The OSA thinks BJ and his ranger buddies make the perfect team to send deep into occupied France to retrieve Agent 2, who is described by the press

release as both beautiful and deadly.

Once this femme fatale is located, it's all guns blazing in a mid-war attempt to shaft Hitler's secret weapons projects, which no doubt means team-based action against super fighters, intelligent tanks, resurrected medieval kings, and zombies.

The focus is very different from RTCW, however. Rather than a series of linear run-and-gun missions, BJ alone against a castle full of Nazis, Enemy Territory will present the player with a bunch of challenging tactical conundrums. It will be necessary to use each member of the Ranger squad to accomplish particular tasks.

Made up of a Field Ops, Engineer, Medic, Soldier and Covert Operative, the squad will face challenges ranging from vicious gunfights to achieving stealth-based objectives, such as retrieving important documents from under the noses of Nazi guards. The Engineer's job, of course, is to blow stuff up. Irritating stuff, like walls, machine gun nests, bunkers, tanks and other obstacles.

It will be possible to use the team to plant minefields, as well as build and repair structures that dispense ammo, equipment, health or increase visibility on the battlefield. Squad members will also be able to steal enemy uniforms and dress up like Nazis, then strut about behind enemy lines

and report positions back to the rest of team.

Along with a promise of an intuitive command system that makes issuing orders "as easy as selecting a weapon", the singleplayer portion of Enemy Territory looks set to give us Commandos 2 with far, far better graphics and a more immediate sense of interaction with the game world.

Counter-Strike Über Alles

While the multiplayer element of RTCW was strong, it only challenged the ubiquitous Counter-Strike for as long as it took the novelty of WW2 to wear off. Not content to admit defeat, Wolfenstein is keen to have another crack at the team-based multiplayer crown. And the brief for Enemy Territory looks very interesting indeed.

Enemy Territory supports 60-player matches. The play will be team-based, but the Axis vs Allies dynamic can be split into 10 six-man fire teams, each with their own objectives. Current information about Enemy Territory doesn't reveal how overall battle objectives will be shared among the five fire teams on each side on the conflict, although each fire team will have a designated Squad Leader who can drop waypoint markers, issue commands, and keep an overall tactical eye on the progression of the battle.



Here's hoping that Enemy Territory will provide the in-depth, gritty and addictive team-based multiplayer experience that we CS-haters have been craving



For the first time in multiplayer, there will be multi-map battles, where objectives in one map lead to objectives in a second or even a third map. The theatre of war stretches from the green fields of Europe to the deserts of North Africa, hopefully offering a wide variety of tactical situations, not just different environment textures.

LEAVE ME ALONE

So what if you love Wolfenstein but don't like team-based multiplayer? It was one of the central inconsistencies of the original RTCW - here was a singleplayer game that emphasised the whole lone-soldier-against-the-might-of-the-SS angle of war, yet had a multiplayer mode that only offered team play. We know from our exhaustive research that team players rarely like solo play games, and solo players usually prefer Deathmatch to Capture the Flag. So why combine the two? Sure, give players the option to use teamplay if they want, they might even decide they like it after all. But RTCW really lacked a Deathmatch mode, especially since it was running the ultimate Deathmatch engine - Quake 3. Once again, unfortunately, Enemy Territory at first glance appears not to offer Deathmatch. It would appear that players can only ever act in teams, even if the whole of the rest of the team is made up of bots. However, the curse is taken off this a little since the singleplayer mode is also team-focussed. All in all, Enemy Territory seems much less schizophrenic than its predecessor and will hopefully offer a complete package instead of a game that was half for one kind of player and half for another. Admit it, hands up who never played RTCW multiplayer or singleplayer based on whether or not you liked CS? I thought so. Next please!

Yes I'm Quite Experienced

Experience is key in Enemy Territory. As multiplayer games progress, players receive experience for kills and for meeting objectives. Experience translates into field promotions, and the player's uniform will actually change to reflect their new rank - a clever idea for gaining in-game kudos with the 133+ crowd.

Higher ranks will unlock more abilities for the player,

including the most immediately important skill of being able to detect land mines. Further abilities include the ability to carry an MG and a heavy weapon together, or to be able to wield a heavy weapon with no movement penalty.

However, for those unexcited by the possibilities of Campaign Mode, there will still be an Objective Mode, which is almost identical to Counter-Strike, with single battles played out in rounds. There is also to option to split each round into four smaller stopwatch rounds, although the effects of doing this are not immediately apparent.

There will also be a Last Man Standing mode, in which the winning team is the one who has, as the name suggests, the only surviving soldier left on the battlefield. Whether an every-man-for-himself version of Last Man Standing will be provided has yet to be confirmed.

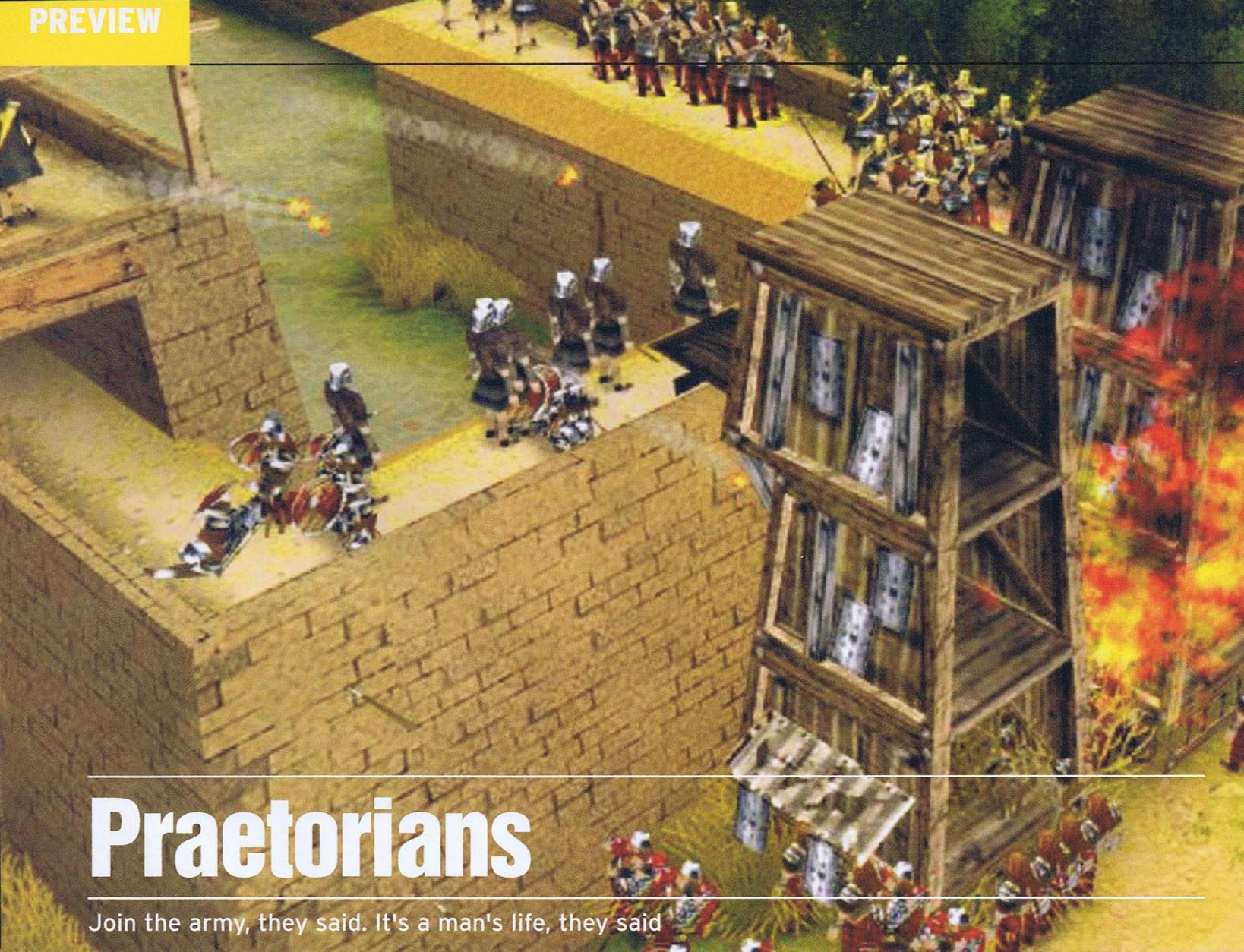
Finally, and most pleasingly, Enemy Territory will include bots, and it will be possible to flesh out all multiplayer modes with computer controlled opponents, at last giving budding BJs the opportunity to get in some vital training while not online. And if the quality of the bots approaches some of the AI we've been seeing lately

from other similar titles, then the bots will provide a useful tool indeed.

Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory will be a stand alone title, so it won't require the original RTCW to run. But id and Activision assure us that it's not a sequel, just a fleshing out of many of the ideas that were given rise by the multiplayer mode of RTCW. The current king of WW2 multiplayer, Battlefield 1942, sacrifices detail for simulating a wide variety of battle conditions. Here's hoping Enemy Territory will provide the in-depth, gritty and above all addictive team-based multiplayer experience that we CS-haters have been craving. You can expect it early next year.

Anthony Fordham





Praetorians

Join the army, they said. It's a man's life, they said

Developer: Pyro Studios ■ **Publisher:** Eidos Interactive ■ **Distributor:** GameNation ■ **Available:** February 2003

From developer Pyro Studios comes yet another Roman-inspired real-time strategy title, aptly named Praetorians. It's always interesting to get both a history lesson and recreational activity out of a game and over the course of Praetorians' 20 missions you'll have the chance to trace the roots of many significant events in history, including the civil wars in Rome, the wars in Egypt and Julius Cesar's conquest of Gaul. However, unlike previous RTS games, rather than emphasizing resource gathering and economic management, Praetorians puts much of the focus on combat options and features.

Although in its current beta state you are only able to play as the Romans, Praetorians will feature three playable sides, each with their own specific unit types and advantages. These are Rome, Egypt and Gaul (corresponding roughly to modern-day France and Belgium). As we've already seen countless times in history, the Romans are extremely well organized and tactical, whereas Gaul is less regimented yet faster and more powerful. Not much has been revealed regarding the Egyptian side, however, it is likely that it will play somewhere in between Gaul and Rome. Each side has access to thirteen unique unit types, including five "special" characters. Among

these units are light infantry, who are the weakest of the lot but can be used for building structures including garrisons and defence towers, heavy infantry, archers, spearmen and cavalry.

Vini Vidi Vici

Commanding troops is as simple as dragging your mouse over them and right-clicking on an object to perform actions or move around the map. An interesting feature found in Praetorians is the ability to save your troop configuration to one of ten spaces. For example, if you have selected a large group of archers and light infantry and then are required to move a scout forward on its own, rather than having to deselect your current troop, move your scout, and then reselect your archers and light infantry again, you can save your current troop configuration using the "CTRL + <number>" command and with the press of a key (from 0-9), you can have your archers and light infantry reselected automatically - especially handy if your units are spread widely across the map.

Furthermore, to make your soldiers easier to manipulate you are able to order units of the same type to band together into one large troop. Similarly, you are also able break up larger troops into smaller units and control them

individually. This is a welcome change from previous RTS titles where you were forced to select every single unit individually, which we're sure you'll agree was a very tedious task indeed.

The key to winning a game of Praetorians lies not only in controlling all villages in your immediate area, but also in knowing where your enemy is positioned so that you can tactically plan how you're going to defeat him. To view enemy



MULTIPLAYER

Like any decent real-time strategy, Praetorians will indeed feature a multiplayer mode. Although the current preview build doesn't allow you to play anything beyond singleplayer tutorials, the final release will enable both LAN and Internet play, with a whopping fifteen different maps that allow for a maximum of eight players each. Although not much is known regarding the different types of multiplayer options that will feature in the final release, there will definitely be the tried and true skirmish mode among a number of others. Let's just hope that there are some fast, local servers to play on when the game finally hits store shelves!

In Praetorians there's a greater tactical emphasis being placed on terrain and a greatly improved troop control

territory you can either move your troops over to it to reveal whatever is in your line of sight, or you can take a more covert approach using one of two special scout characters. The first scout character is a lightly armoured unit with a wide field of view and a hawk perched on his shoulder. You are able to control the hawk to fly over any territory you wish, revealing all enemy units hidden beneath the thick fog of war. However, in order to control use of this unit, Pyro Studios has decided to only allow the hawk a limited amount of fly time, as well as the inability to see through thick terrain such as forests. The second scout unit, the wolf, like the hawk only has a certain amount of movement time, however, after the wolf's movement time runs out it doesn't move

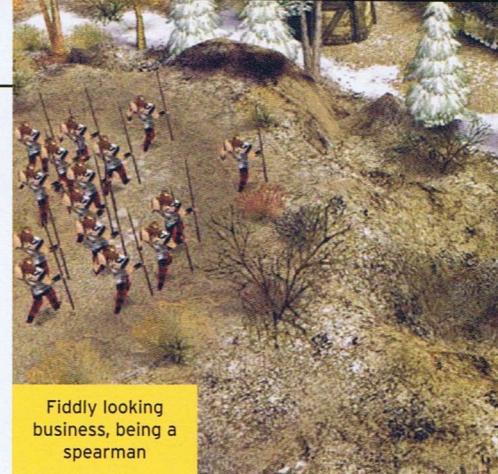
back to its original position, but rather sits stationary meaning that you can constantly monitor an area without having to keep flying over it with your hawk.

Another special Roman character featured in Praetorians is the Centurion, whose main role is to lead your troops into battle, boosting their confidence and morale, as well as recruiting new units.

Marcus Hairiolus

As hinted at above, terrain plays a very important role in Praetorians, and is vital to your ultimate success in many of the missions on offer. For example, some unit types are able to hide in thick forest or long grass, making them invisible to any enemies passing by and thus, perfect for ambushing. As well as this, hills and mountains can be tactically used to your advantage as troops located on higher ground can not only see further, but projectile units such as archers have a much greater range of attack as well. Seeing as archers are extremely vulnerable to short-range fighting, positioning them on top of hills is very effective as it makes it much harder for enemy troops to reach them.

Rather than being sprite based, like most current RTS games Praetorians is completely 3D, and boy is it pretty. Environments look great, as well as troop models and fighting. Dynamic weather effects are also on offer including rain, snow and thunder, greatly adding to the game's atmosphere. It's unsurprising that most of the gameplay takes place on desert-like terrain, featuring stone buildings, shrubs, tumbleweeds, thick forests and the occasional river. Each of these objects have been modelled beautifully, which came as quite a surprise seeing as the primary focus of many past RTS titles has been on gameplay and unit



Fiddly looking business, being a spearman

variety rather than stunning visuals.

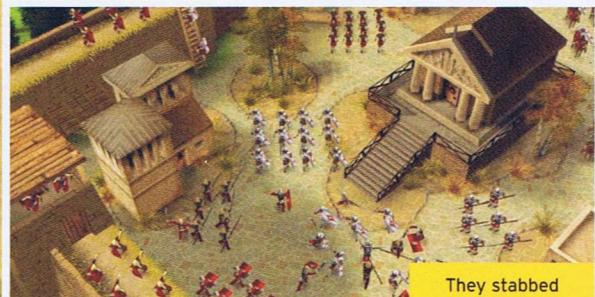
Complementing the game's awesome graphics are some great sound effects - rain and thunder builds suspense and tension, while the cries of slain enemies as well as units charging into battle gives players a welcome adrenaline rush.

Wicked Flavius

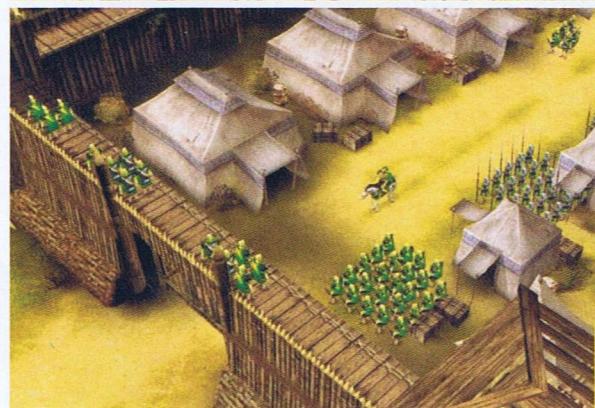
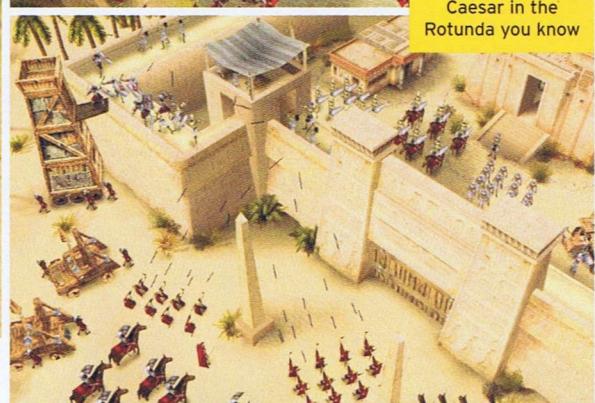
All that said, in its current state, Praetorians is not without its flaws. For example, we found that building both units and structures was quite a slow process that can make gameplay dull at times when you are just waiting around for more soldiers to send into battle. Furthermore, although there is a "run" option, we found that most units, even cavalry, move quite slowly, which again, may lead to boring gameplay if you have to get to a location half way across the map. Hopefully these minor flaws will be fixed for the final release.

Overall, judging from what we've seen so far, Praetorians looks to be a very promising title with excellent sound and visuals, as well as unique gameplay elements such as a greater tactical emphasis being placed on terrain and a greatly improved troop control systems. Does Praetorians have what it takes to compete with the likes of Age of Mythology and Command and Conquer: Generals? Well, you'll just have to wait for the release to find out.

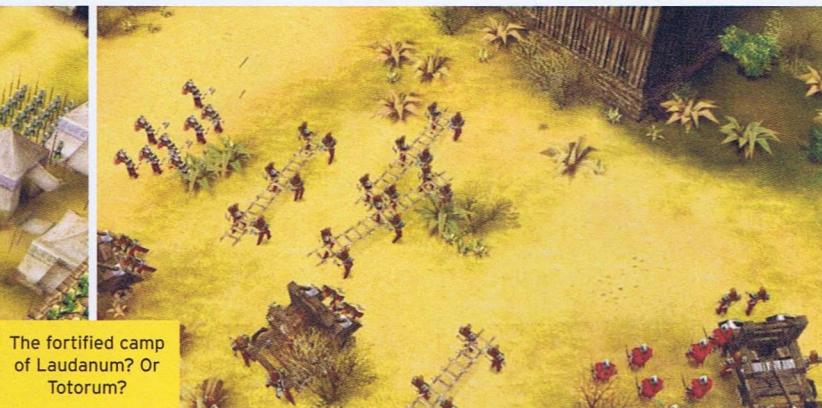
Asher Moses



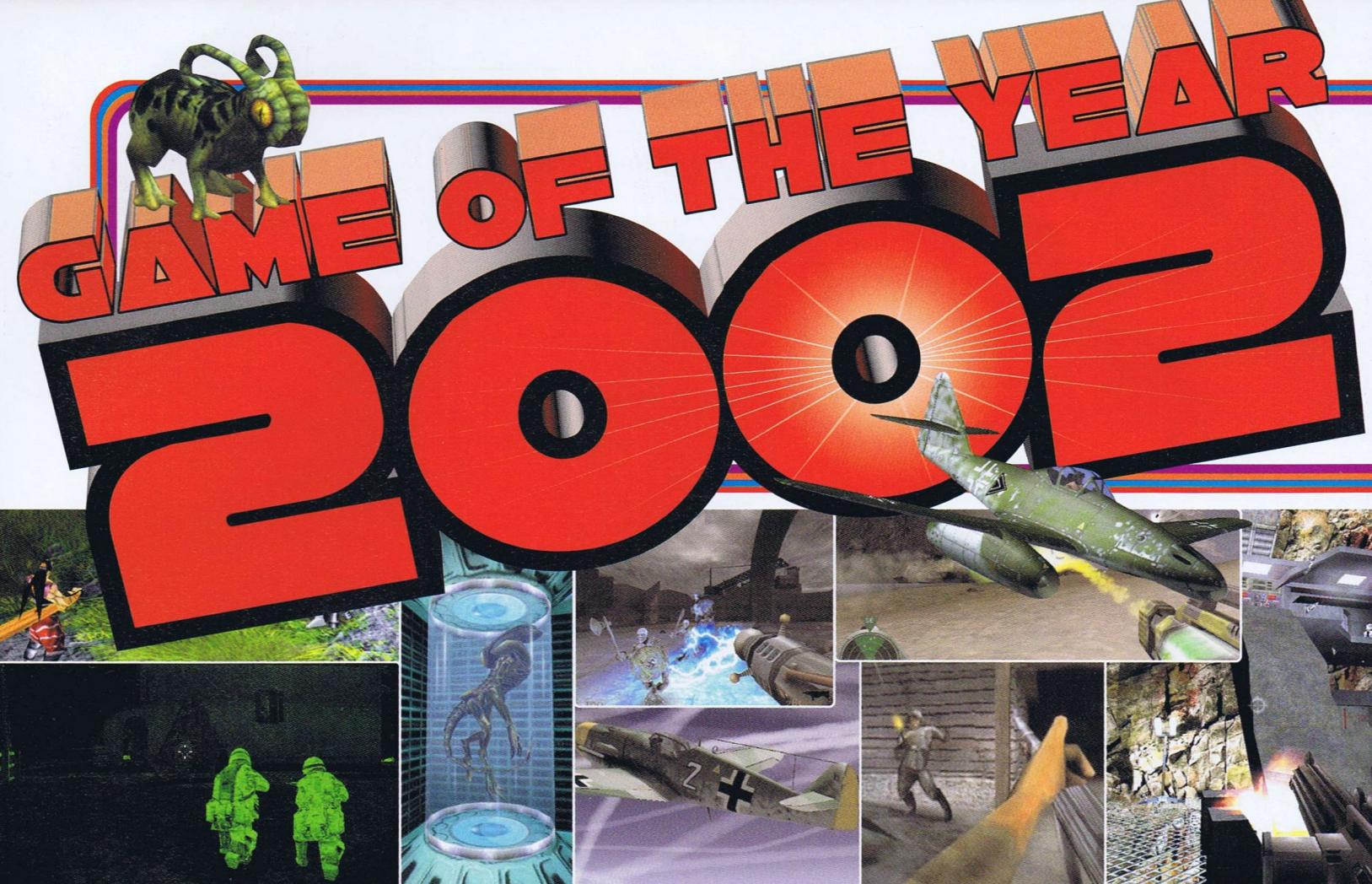
They stabbed Caesar in the Rotunda you know



The fortified camp of Laudanum? Or Totorum?



That's one lonely-looking tortoise



WW2 with a Lightsaber

The year started out kind of slow, with only three classic games in the first three issues. But it wasn't all bad, because those classics were Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, Return to Castle Wolfenstein and C&C Renegade.

Leading the charge of the WW2-revivalist movement that still doesn't seem quite finished with us, Wolfenstein was a remake of the ancient classic from the very, very early days of PC gaming, where blue walls swung about your head with sickening parallax. RTCW had superb environmental graphics thanks to its id Software heritage, and boasted crazy zombified Nazis, hot chicks in leather with sten guns and a resurrected medieval king.

Of course, as far as recreating that elusive WW2 atmosphere, RTCW was quickly overcome and stomped into the dirt by Medal of Honor, a game that remained pleasingly faithful to the reality of the Allied invasion of Europe. The Normandy map, despite being a shameless Saving Private Ryan ripoff, remains one of the more harrowing experiences in FPS.

C&C Renegade, on the other hand, had nothing to do with history but instead focused on giving a fresh new firstperson perspective on that oh-so-familiar Command & Conquer universe. Westwood chose to use a lean and mean engine that didn't look so pretty but ran well on a variety of systems. Multiplayer was the real joy here, as the singleplayer campaign was too simplistic and, let's be honest here, pig-ugly.

Those unimpressed by Renegade could scratch their gaming itch with Jedi Outcast. This Star Wars FPS was little short of superb, with far superior implementation of Force powers and lightsaber moves that its predecessors. Worked especially well with a Voice Commander, so your Force moves could simply be spoken into the mike.

Finally, just when it looked like it was FPS or nothing until Easter, along came Dungeon Siege. It took a decent swipe at the crown of Diablo 2, but a simplistic quest system, extra-linear levels and uninspired items meant it had to be satisfied with merely being very very good.

Superheroes and cheap hoods

In PCPP#74, we also finally got our hands on the very tasty and all-Australian made Freedom Force, where too many superheroes were barely enough. Set very definitely in the Gold Age of comics, heroes were wholesome and easy to understand. Even the enemies wanted nothing more sordid or complicated than the complete domination of the known world. It was clean, and it was good.

Grand Theft Auto 3, on the other hand, was no less good but it sure as hell wasn't clean. Despite being banned from sale, delayed in its port from PS2, and generally stuffed around, GTA3 still managed to turn out as one of the most compelling free-form games seen in recent times. Everything from jumping firetrucks to overhead rail lines to listening to the radio - "Have you ever eaten Opossum?" - GTA3 had more or less everything. Tooling around in a stolen tank was also particularly satisfying.

August also saw the first of 2002's hardcore RPGs in the form of Elder

Scrolls: Morrowind. In full 3D with beautiful environments and hundreds of NPCs to meet, piss off and eventually slaughter, it truly was a glimpse of the future of RPGs on the PC. It was also chock full of oddball quests, such as the quest to get your shoes back off a naughty storekeeper who simply stole them from you.

If your frustration at Morrowind ran too high however, there was always Soldier of Fortune 2 no more than a quick trip to EB away, with more gore, violence and realistically exploding skulls than any other game. And yet, the variety of weapons and the mission structure made it more than just titillation - there was a strong shooter buried in there somewhere under the mountains of steaming intestines. And multiplayer was little short of outstanding.

Before the big games started rolling in the latter half of the year, we had one more treat to enjoy: Grand Prix 4. With dozens of enhancements to the last in Grammond's perennials series, it wowed Victor Webster our resident racing nut, to the extent that we had to literally prise

GAME

ISSUE SCORE

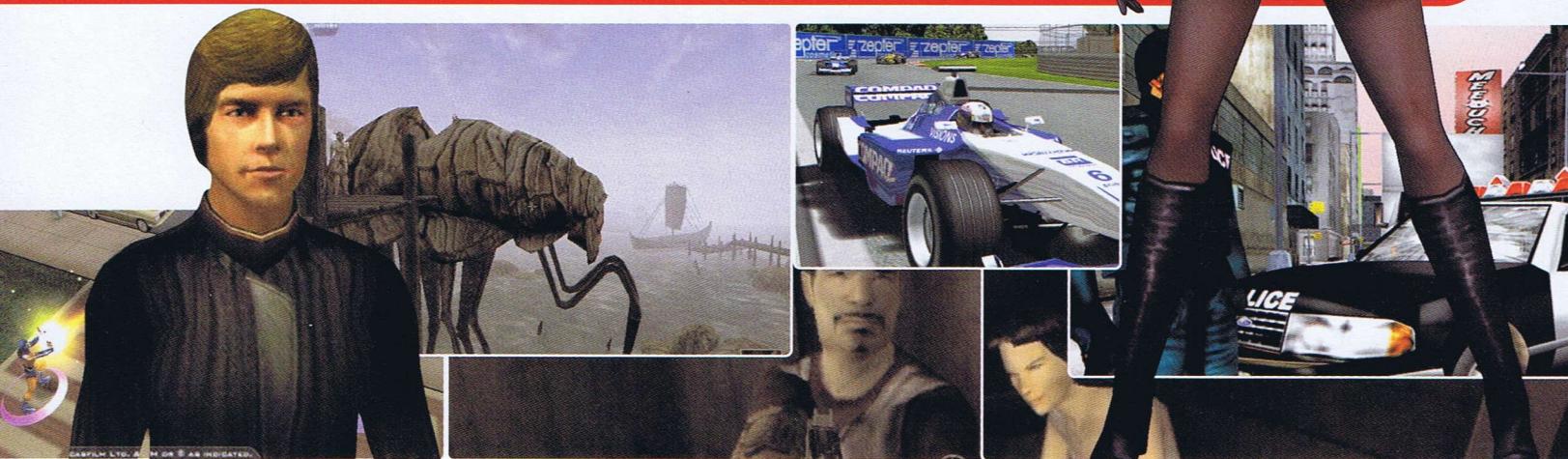
Aquanox	70	79	Star Trek Armada 2	70	55	SWINE	71	88	Serious Sam	72	81
Champ Manager 2001/2002	70	82	Supercar Street Challenge	70	36	Trainz	71	81	Tropico: Paradise Island	72	74
Etherlords	70	86	The Sims: Hot Date	70	77	UEFA 2001/2002	71	84	WW2 Online	72	51
Gorasul	70	65	Uplink	70	59	V8 Challenge	71	79	Disciples 2	73	89
Grand Prix 3 2000	70	80	Wizardry 8	70	90	Waterloo	71	80	Everquest: Shadows of Luclin	73	84
Medal of Honor	70	90	Army Men RTS	71	80	Black & White: Creature Isle	72	78	Jedi Outcast	73	90
Myth 3	70	61	Europa Universalis	71	68	C&C Renegade	72	89	Kohan: Ahriman's Gift	73	88
New York Race	70	70	Flight Downunder 2002	71	70	Commande 4	72	83	Machwarrior 4: Black Knight	73	79
Rally Trophy	70	68	Gadget Tycoon	71	77	Dark Age of Camelot	72	76	Motoracer 3	73	80
Red Hammer	70	85	Kohan	71	82	Deadly Dozen	72	79	Star Trek: Bridge Commander	73	79
Return to Castle Wolfenstein	70	89	Sim Golf	71	86	Europa Universalis 2	72	78	War Commander	73	59
Soul Reaver 2	70	80	Star Wars: Starfighter	71	80	Pepsi Max Extreme Sports	72	70	Warlords Battlecry 2	73	88

AN INVITATION TO VOTE!

Another year has passed, another 13 issues of PC PowerPlay are safe in their hermetically sealed binder, pride-of-place on the living room mantelpiece. And that means it's time once again for all you folks in subscriber-land, newsagent-land and even strange and distant supermarket-land to get out your pencils, ask mum or dad's permission before cutting with the scissors (if your mum or dad lives in Woy Woy, you may ask your wife) and get your votes in for the PCPP Game of the Year.

We must ask that eternal question yet again: was 2002 a great year for games? We certainly got our fair share of classics, with 26 Gold Awards passed out during the last 13 issues - not too bad out of a total of less than 200 games.

So in order to assist you in casting your vote, here's a very brief recap of some of the stand out titles in 2002, and what kind of effect they had on us. Enjoy!



2002 FACTS

Highest Scoring Game:
November PCPP#79
Battlefield 1942: 97%
Lowest Scoring Game:
December PCPP#80
Tsunami 2265: 30%
Gold Awards: 26
Games Scoring Under 60: 11
Most Golden Issue:
June PCPP#74: 4 Gold Awards
Least Golden Issue:
April PCPP#72: no Gold
Number of games by genre:
Firstperson Shooters: 32
Role Playing Games: 23
Realtime Strategy: 20
Turn-based Strategy: 8
Sports: 12
Driving: 16
Flight Simulators: 10
Space combat simulators: 5
MMOG: 7
Management: 11
Unspeakably unclassifiable: 10
Number of games by niche genre:
Everquest expansions: 2
Star Trek games: 3
Star Wars games: 4
Sims expansions: 3

him away from his Thrustmaster force-feedback wheel and pedal set.

AD&D and Orcs in Iraq

In PCPP#77, our September issue, we seemed to hit some kind of critical mass for quality. The games really started to roll, kicking off with Neverwinter Nights. We voted this our best game of all time in our annual Top 100, and the award still stands. A near-perfect implementation of the AD&D 3rd Edition ruleset, massive choice in character development, a kick-ass quest system and beautiful 3D graphics made it a winner, and the upcoming expansion packs will keep it there. Not only that, NWN's expandability is being embraced by mod crews across the Net, so the supply of new material for this exemplary RPG should theoretically never dry up.

If NWN wasn't enough, or if RPG wasn't your bag, it really didn't matter because in the very same issue we featured the long-awaited review of Warcraft 3. Thankfully, in true Blizzard style, it was - and remains - a prime example of how RTS should be.

Compelling singleplayer, awesome multiplayer across Battle.net, impeccable play balance and four races make Warcraft 3 just... great. And the Collector's Edition had enough extra stuff in it to make it almost worth the \$150 price tag.

Returning from the worlds of High Fantasy it was clearly time for a bit of historical perspective. First up, it was modern history with Conflict: Desert Storm, the nicely tricked-out squad-based tactical shooter set in the middle of the Gulf War. Topical and well-executed, it made us drool for the upcoming likes of Black Hawk Down and Raven Shield.

Stepping back a little further in time to the middle ages, Medieval: Total War proved a surprise hit. The sequel to Shogun: Total War it upped the ante with even more troops on the field, massive siege equipment, even bigger castles and of course, peasants with the plague. It was wargaming at its most detailed.

Wargaming at its most essential on the other hand reared its head in the form of Chessmaster 9000. This is, simply, the ultimate chess simulation for PC. It's so advanced, even the virtual

labrador will kick your arse with a devastating Queen's Gambit, before slobbering all over your pawns.

Sex, mutants and UT2003

Some games stick in your hand because of their crapulence. Honestly, to this day we don't know what the developers of Largo Winch were thinking. Here's a young man who unexpectedly inherits a multi-billion dollar company, and then gets to sleep with every badly rendered female 'character'. Of course, you as an impressionable young player don't get to SEE any of the sex, the lights always go out at the critical moment. Game of the Year material? Only if you want to send a message to those clowns in Congress. What a bunch of clowns.

On the other hand, the Thing showed that it was possible to create a tense horror movie experience using only the conventions of the firstperson shooter. It even managed to be scary in the first mission where there were no monsters at all.

Then we came to Battlefield 1942. This was our highest scoring game of the year, as it finally gave gamers an online

Dungeon Siege	74	87	II2 Sturmovik: Eastern Thunder	75	88	4x4 Evo 2	77	79	Cricket 2002	78	75
FIFA 2002 World Cup	74	90	Pac-Man All Stars	75	50	Age of Wonders 2	77	84	Eurofighter Typhoon: Operation Icebreaker	78	78
Freedom Force	74	94	Sims Vacation	75	67	Clone Campaigns	77	79	Gore	78	46
Ghost Recon: Desert Siege	74	75	Tiger Woods 2002	75	90	F1 2002	77	61	Hero X	78	68
Global Operations	74	79	Tony Hawk 3	75	91	Grand Prix 4	77	91	Industry Giant 2	78	80
Grandia II	74	70	Zanzarah	75	72	Neverwinter Nights	77	96	Medieval: Total War	78	92
Heroes of Might & Magic 4	74	92	Cultures 2	76	70	Stealth Combat	77	65	Mobile Forces	78	83
Might & Magic IX	74	88	Grand Theft Auto 3	76	89	Sum of All Fears	77	82	Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	78	88
NASCAR 2002	74	94	Hotel Giant	76	72	Tactical Ops	77	60	Schumacher KART 2002	78	68
Warrior Kings	74	84	Morrowind	76	92	Warcraft 3	77	95	Starmageddon	78	70
Flight Hong Kong	75	86	Soldier of Fortune 2	76	91	A320 Professional	78	86	Syberia	78	71
Hidden & Dangerous Deluxe	75	65	Spiderman: The Movie	76	86	Conflict: Desert Storm	78	90			



action experience that was deeper than the likes of Quake 3, but didn't require monthly fees and the stupid amount of time expected of EverQuest players. Jere in particular was more than a little impressed with this game, and even to this day he still uses it as the central argument in his continuing PC versus the Macintosh Holy Wars.

In PCPP#80, our December issue, we also finally got our hands on something we'd been waiting for a long time: a decent organised crime simulator. Mafia expected you to earn a reputation in the Family, race genuine 1930s autos and bust a few heads in dingy speakeasies across prohibition US.

And then, like something out of a dream, Unreal Tournament 2003 was here. With graphics like nothing else on the market and a recommended system requirement box to match, our excitement was only dulled a little when we discovered it was pretty much exactly the same game as Unreal Tournament, with a few different weapons.

Alternate history

In our Christmas issue, the last PCPP to be released with a 2002 label on it, we tucked it with our usual gusto to such titles as Asheron's Call 2. This MMORPG showed great promise; a decent levelling system, plenty of player interaction and graphics to die for. We were only a little disappointed when a month after going to print we were informed that an Australian release of AC2 looks extremely doubtful. In fact, it even looks as though ordering it in from the US could be problematic, as the AC2 monthly subscription system seems set to exclude all but a handful of countries from creating accounts.

It's fortunate then that there's still Ironstorm to play. Our score of 96 certainly generated its fair share of controversy on the PCPP Forums. But this was a return to the roots of FPS, with nicely designed levels, groovy scripted events and a rollicking story that kept you charging down the corridors gunning down those naughty Russo-German soldiers. Game of the year? In the opinions of some at PCPP, yes. But it's your vote that really counts.

Ironstorm may have had the highest score of any FPS in 2002, but it wasn't for want of competition. No One Lives Forever 2 took the 60s-tastic flavour of its predecessor and beefed it even further, adding crazy makeup-based weapons, more wisecracks, and more fat men with big guns. In a year with no Lara Croft, Cate Archer filled the PC game-vixen role quite admirably, thanks mainly to a higher poly-count and her ninja-fighting antics.

Rounding off our recap of 2002 now, it's necessary to include a couple of titles from the January 2003 issue of PCPP, as this edition actually comes out in December 2002 and contains 2002 releases. One of these was of course the mighty Age of Mythology, one of the most serious and most expertly developed RTS games we've ever seen. It should be part of your collection, but will it get your vote for game of the year? We shall see.

And bringing up the rear, sadly rather shamed-faced, was the latest EverQuest expansion: Planes of Power. Completely useless for any but the highest of high-level players, we truly

wonder at how SOE and Ubi Soft plan to sell it. Hopefully, not by preying on the ignorance of an uneducated gaming population. Fortunately anyone who read our review won't be uneducated any more - we gave it a merciless 45. Avoid it, unless you're totally addicted to EQ and have a Level 60 character, in which case we'd advise spending the \$49.95 on professional care.

Now vote!

Those, as well as the list at the bottom of each page, were the games of 2002. Now it's time for you to chose. Select ten titles and then rank them in order of preference. And for your number one title, give us a short reason for why you believe this to be the Game of the Year. A prize? You want a prize for voting, some kind of incentive? Well stay tuned for next month, when we'll announce what amazing thing you'll be in the running for, just for voting in the PCPP 2002 Game of the Year. Now get voting!



GAME

ISSUE SCORE

Taz Wanted	78	71	Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom	80	78	Links 2003	81	79	Airlines 2	82	65
Aliens vs Predator 2: Primal Hunt	79	71	Madden NFL 2003	80	89	Need For Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	81	85	Civilization 3 Play the World	82	88
Celtic Kings	79	70	Mafia	80	91	No One Lives Forever 2	81	93	Combat Flight Sim 3	82	78
Chessmaster 9000	79	94	Tsunami 2265	80	30	Rollercoaster Tycoon 2	81	79	EverQuest: Planes of Power	82	45
Delta Force 4	79	75	Unreal Tournament 2003	80	89	Sims Unleashed	81	81	Lord of the Rings	82	61
Icewind Dale 2	79	87	Asheron's Call 2	81	83	Speed Challenge: Villeneuve's	81	74	Mechwarrior 4 Mercenaries	82	90
Largo Winch	79	51	Divine Divinity	81	87	Racing Vision	81	84	Mutant Storm	82	79
Lego Football Mania	79	80	Empire Earth: The Art of Conquest	81	76	Starfleet Command 3	81	82	Rallisport	82	69
The Thing	79	94	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	81	82	Stronghold Crusader	81	83	Xtreme Air Racing	82	70
Winter of the Wolf	79	80	Ironstorm	81	96	Sudden Strike 2	81	78			
Battlefield 1942	80	97	Legion	81	60	Total Club Manager 2003	81	78			
Beach Life	80	80	Age of Mythology	82	93						



BEST GAME OF 2001

1.

Why is this the game of the year?

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

YOUR DETAILS

Name:

Address:

Postcode:

State:

Country:

HOW TO VOTE

Simply write your favourite game of 2002 in the top space and then provide a brief reason for why you believe this should be the game of the year. Then fill in the rest of the positions with the other worthy 2002 releases and send the whole caboodle to:

**PC PowerPlay
GOTY Primaries
78 Renwick St
Redfern 2016**

ARE YOU GAME ?



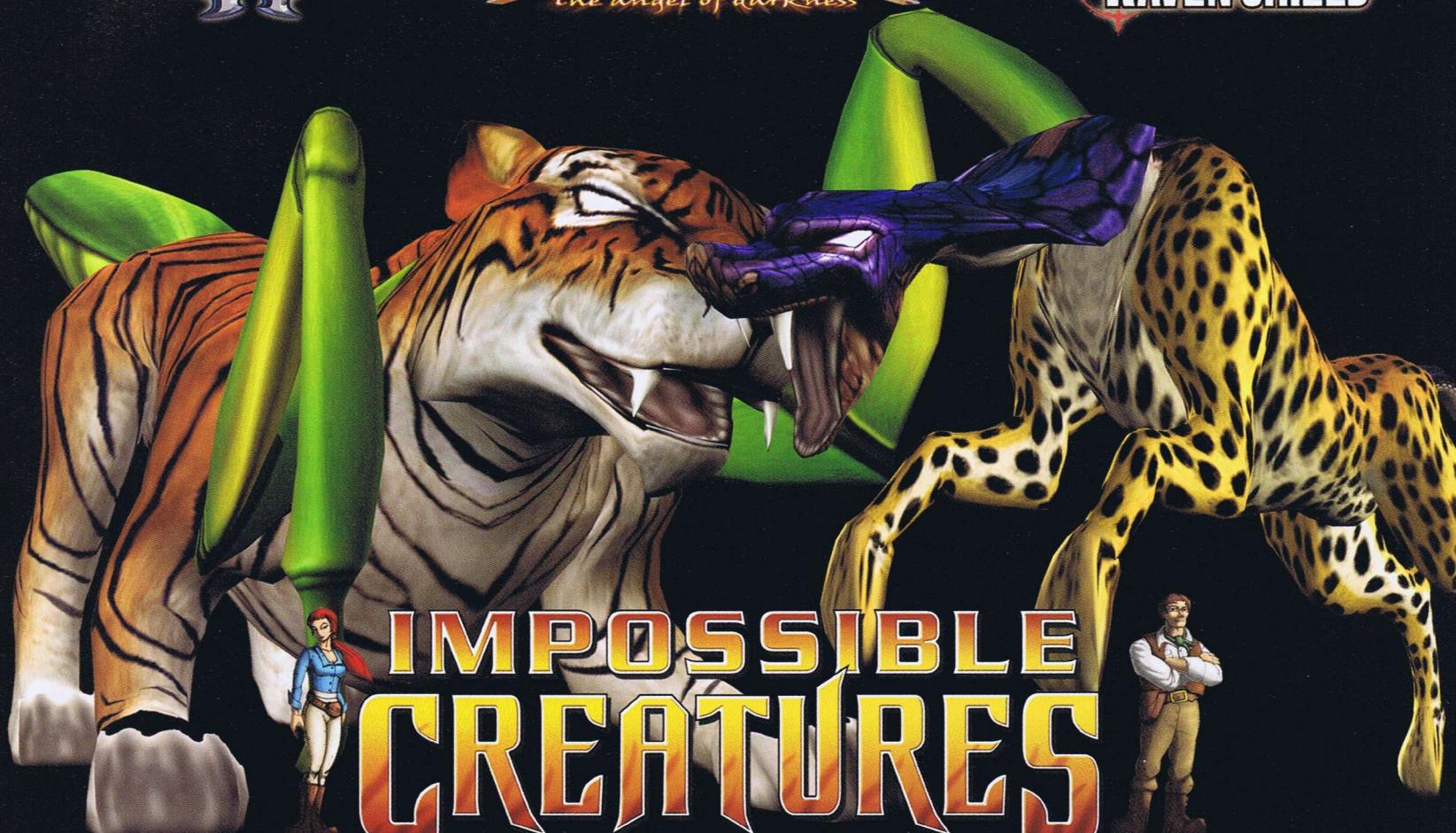
UNREAL
Tournament
II



LARA CROFT
TOMB RAIDER
the angel of darkness



Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX
RAVEN SHIELD



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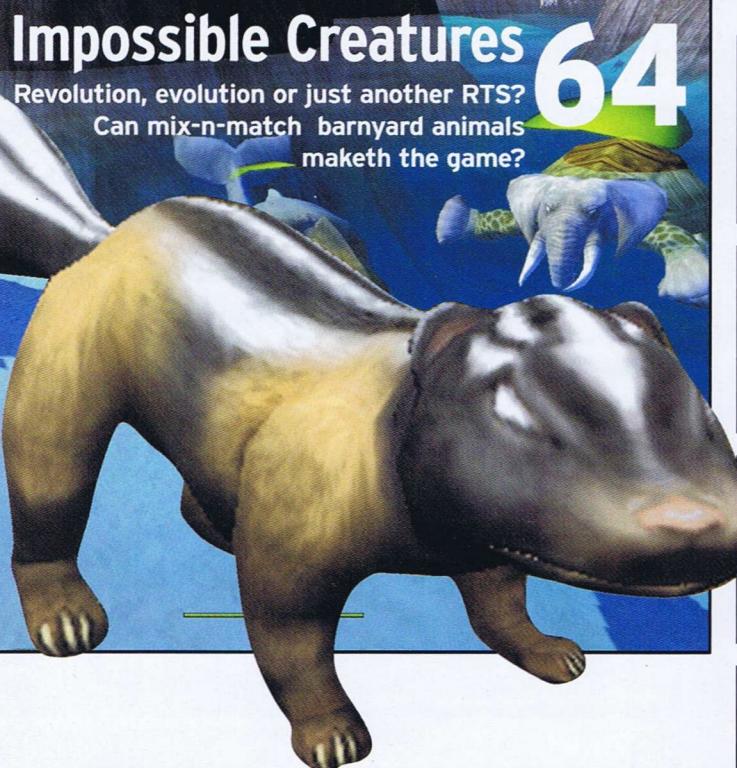
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IN REVIEW

THE MOST AUTHORITATIVE REVIEWS AROUND



Although by the time you read this the "incident" will be well and truly over the reverberations in the industry will remain with us for a long time. What was this catastrophic event? Why the leaking of the Doom III alpha of course. For those not in the know, at the end of 2002 someone, somewhere distributed a copy of the Doom III alpha to a warez group and within hours Internet backbones were struggling as gamers all over the world rushed to get a first look at this most anticipated of games.

It is speculated but not actually confirmed that an employee of ATI's software division was optimising 9700 drivers for Doom III when for reasons that no-one is sure of suddenly decided to distribute it globally. Was this just a simple act of stupidity or has something from the seedy, murky depths of corporate espionage deviously achieved a more sinister objective? Murmuring around the editorial department at Next has uncovered this gem of a potential conspiracy theory which although just pure speculation is interesting to ponder. With the video card wars being waged around us there is the very vague possibility that a competitor to ATI may have coerced said evil-employee with a large cash bonus to try and discredit the company.

Irrespective of any reasons the current reality is that this little event hasn't elevated us gamers to new heights of l33tn3ss because we saw a desirable product in its early stages. Those that were privy to the alpha would have quickly realised that it was utterly un-optimised and as such bordered on unplayable.

For those that uselessly bleat that piracy harms no-one, think again. Piracy is still a valid reason that developers use to rationalise the high price of their product and as long as piracy remains is all the justification they need. In the case of the Doom III leak, consider this. Due to Carmack's completely understandable fury given the situation do you think ATI will ever be given alpha code from id or any other gameco? Maybe, when Hell freezes over. Yet this is just the beginning. Chances are that id are unlikely to trust other companies with their code again so nVidia folk are also likely to reap the "rewards" of warez stupidity.

So, what did we, as a community, benefit from this great act of information freedom? Some unplayable code and a new era of mistrust between gamecos and hardware manufacturers. Give it half a year and there is the very real possibility that gamers are going to find incompatibilities between brand new games and their current drivers. When this happens, you can thank the hordes of l33t warez types that actually believe they're superior to us.

But enough of this sobering message, the games reviewed on the following pages are for entertainment, so take a deep breath. Now, loudly scream torrents of abuse directed at the pirating perpetrators and once satisfied read the latest reviews written by our cheery and capable writing team to once again lift your spirits.

Jere Lawrence
Deputy Editor
jere@next.com.au



THE PCPP REVIEW RATINGS SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.

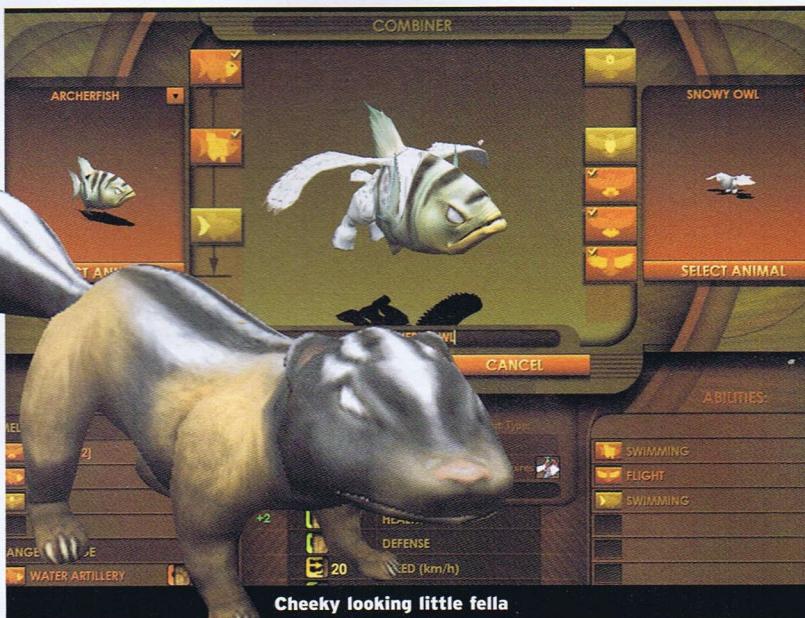
- Need** The minimum requirements for playable speed.
Want The ideal system requirements for the game.
For The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.



IMPOSSIBLE CREATURES

Developer: Relic ■ **Publisher:** Microsoft ■ **Distributor:** Microsoft ■ **Price:** \$89.95 ■ **Rating:** M15+ ■ **Available:** Now

I didn't start rocking until I made a Ratcat



SYSTEM

NEED

P3-667
128MB RAM
GeForce2
750MB HDD

WANT

P3-1GHz+
256MB RAM
GeForce3
750MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.impossible.com
Brand innovations!
It's awesome! And
chock full of really
overdone Flash. Yes,
these are the people
responsible for those
hideous logos that
plague your life!



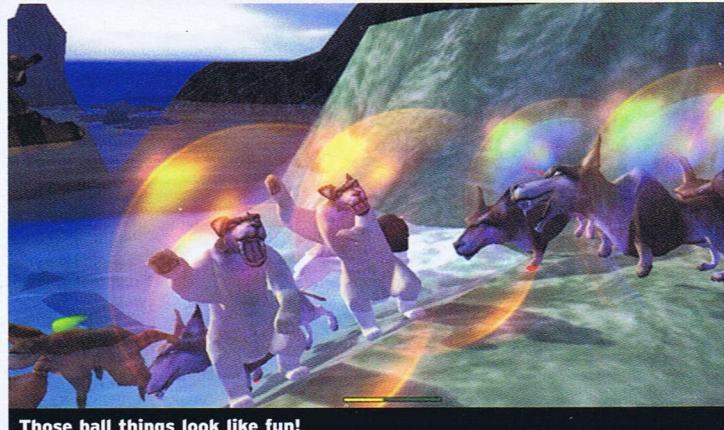
Cliche time

Id Noah could not have been a happy camper. Forty days and forty nights stuck on his Ark with two of every fish, animal, and insect alive. With barely enough room to swing a rat, the full house sign must have well and truly been out. Now, if only he lived in the world of Impossible Creatures. He could have taken along a mere handful of genetically combined creatures, cut his load by at least one half, and still had enough DNA to repopulate the animal kingdom after the waters subsided. Then the old bloke could have spent more time strolling along the decks with the missus of an evening, and avoided what must surely been one of the worst jobs in the history of mankind: mucking out the stalls of all those animals.

Impossible Creatures is the latest offering from Relic Entertainment, the same developers behind the revolutionary Homeworld. In the same way that Homeworld redefined the RTS by successfully transporting gameplay into the freedom of 3D space, Relic are hoping that Impossible Creatures will add something equally groundbreaking to the genre. This lofty ambition rests upon an innovative feature that allows players to create and design their own units. In Impossible Creatures, the type and variety of units is almost only limited by the player's imagination.

When Rex arrives he finds that dad hasn't exactly been spending the missing years pining over his son, but instead researching a new technology, codenamed Sigma. Like something out of a trashy science fiction rag, the technology allows the DNA from two different animals, fishes, or insects to be combined to create a hybrid creature.

While Dr Chanikov might have had his eye on the Nobel Prize, his research sponsor, Upton Julius, has other plans, hoping to use the technology and resultant mutant creature armies to achieve (yawn) world domination. By now you'd think wealthy criminal masterminds could



TURN IT DOWN

Although most of IC's structures follow typical RTS blueprints, one of the more interesting buildings is the Soundbeam Tower. Performing the same function as a typical archery tower or pillbox they are used to defend bases and coal pockets under a player's control. However, instead of firing deadly missiles at enemies, the towers emit high frequency soundwaves to incapacitate and kill opposing creatures. Of course, playing a constant medley of Britney Spears tunes would have achieved the same result.

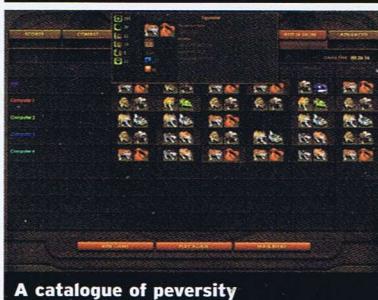
have come up with other ambitions. Anyway, you know there's no way Rex is going to stand for that, particularly since his father has also mysteriously disappeared. Teaming up with Dr Lucy Willing, his father's assistant, Rex sets out to stop Julius' fiendish plans.

If it all sounds suspiciously like Jurassic Park (scientists with God



The flying goat is eating his head!

I don't like this new aquarium



A catalogue of perversity



Tell me doctor, can you cure this cruel disfigurement?

complexes messing about with DNA on a remote island), that's not surprising. IC borrows heavily from that movie and from others like the Indiana Jones and The Mummy series. Indeed, Rex and Lucy are virtual carbon copies of Brendan Fraser's and Rachel Weisz's characters from The Mummy. While the storyline and setting might not be original, at least they're presented with some panache and humour in IC. Rex and Lucy trade plenty of amusing barbs and wisecracks throughout the singleplayer game.

There are only 14 scenarios in the campaign mode and although it is superbly executed throughout with amusing cutscenes and on-the-fly dialogue and story developments as gameplay continues, it is a little short. While Rex and Lucy are transported to different maps in their quest to defeat Julius, the basic gameplay elements tend to remain the same. Although there is a separate helpful training tutorial, the singleplayer game does a good job of explaining the ins and outs of the game through the first few scenarios.

While IC plays much like a conventional RTS, handling the creature combination system takes a little getting used to. In multiplayer or skirmish mode, players can preselect genetic pools of

animals with which to begin creature creation; in the campaign mode, players must use Rex and his dart gun to first collect DNA samples from "regular" creatures wandering across the maps. Once this has been obtained, Dr Hammond mode kicks in and players can begin creating all sorts of unique beasts to take on the mutant might of Julius.

Mutant Creation 101

The combining process is a relatively straightforward affair. Players simply select two beasts, press a button, and hey presto: instant abomination of nature. Once the beast has been created, players can then choose which parts of the body of which beast to keep. Each body part typically affects a creature's different attributes. For instance, the head and front legs govern melee attacks, the torso influences a creature's hit points and defensive capabilities, while the hind legs regulate a creature's speed. Extra appendages such as wings, flippers, claws, or stinger tails obviously affect whether a creature has an extra attack, is amphibious, or has the power of flight.

Different combinations shape a creature's five attributes: Health, Defence, Speed, Sight Radius, and Size. Certain creatures also possess special abilities or attacks which can be activated in limited bursts during combat. For instance the Frenzy attack, which creatures such as the Great White Shark possess, temporarily increases a creature's speed and the amount of damage it can inflict; the flipside is that it in turn becomes more susceptible to damage. Also, creatures like the Wolf are pack hunters and receive bonuses when attacking in groups of three or more. Some creatures receive defensive bonuses when attacked by creatures of the same species, while others are able to



Don't worry, we can try again later...

DIY MINI-GAME

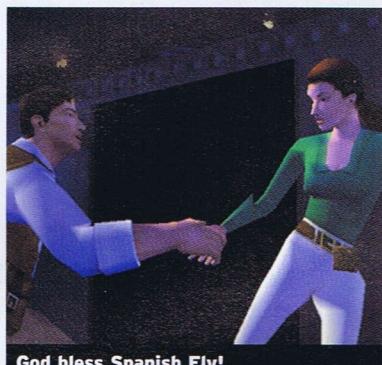
Apart from the typical campaign, multiplayer and free battle modes, IC is surprisingly lacking in play modes. Fear not, because creative players can tackle their own mini-game by trying to generate the butt-ugliest looking critter possible that only a mother or B-grade monster movie fan could love. Take a snapshot of it, blow it up and print it out, then use it to scare younger siblings and annoying small children. Our personnel faves are combinations using the Lobster or Gorilla which always guarantee something truly hideous.

employ attacks unique to their species such as Quill Bursts (Porcupine), Electric Charges (Electric Eel) and Stink Cloud (Skunk, or any creature fed baked beans). The variety of special abilities and attributes means that there is plenty of variety to the gameplay and players won't become bored with units which are good at only doing one thing as is frequently the case with many RTS titles.

The AI does not always automatically select the strongest combination of body parts. This gives players ample opportunity to play mad scientist and experiment with what combination works best for their needs and playing style. There's little point creating an army of powerful but slow beasts if you prefer to employ a blitzkrieg style. The whole system gives the player an enormous amount of freedom, perhaps more so than in any RTS to date.

Yet players can't simply combine two powerful beasts such as a Killer Whale and Musk Ox and think that they're home and hosed. Apart from creatures having certain weaknesses, the more powerful a beast, the more it costs to produce. Players may prefer quantity over quality, favouring more medium-strength beasts that can be produced quickly instead of a small number of mega powerful beasts that cost an arm and a leg to create. In IC, it's all about choice.

Once creatures have been added to a player's army, they do not become instantly available. Before the more powerful creatures can be produced, players will need to research the technology (up to five levels) to produce them.



God bless Spanish Fly!



WOMEN'S LIB

While Rex gets to go gallivanting around the countryside firing his darts into every hapless creature that crosses his path and basically shirk all manual labour, Lucy gets stuck with all the dirty work like sabotaging enemy buildings and stealing technology from opponents. But, in what must be a huge step backwards for the feminist movement and which might well alienate female gamers, players can only use Lucy to help the henchmen collect coal. While she's sweating it out with a pick and barrow, Rex gets to put his feet up and relax. All that's missing is for Lucy to fetch him a beer.



Squash them like the bugs they are!



Skunk attack! Run!

Also, players will also need to poach the technology to build water and air chambers, which are prerequisites for creatures with swimming and flying capabilities.

Resource Mismanagement

There are only two types of resources to manage in IC: coal and electricity. Coal is a finite natural resource, only located in certain pockets scattered across each map and is harvested by Quasimodo-like henchmen who perform their duties with mindless devotion. In contrast, electricity needs to be generated through

construction of lightning rods and generators built over natural geothermal geysers. The resource system is a little unbalanced in the sense that players rely more heavily on coal than electricity for virtually every aspect of gameplay from creature production to research to building construction.

The result is that victory will often be determined by seizure and control of coal pockets. While this is by no means a bad thing and adds to the overall strategy elements, it becomes an issue when resource management is so one-dimensional; Total Annihilation suffered from the same problem. While players will scrap tooth and nail over every coal deposit, after construction of a generator and a couple of lightening rods, they can essentially forget about electricity production which takes away an important aspect of resource management.

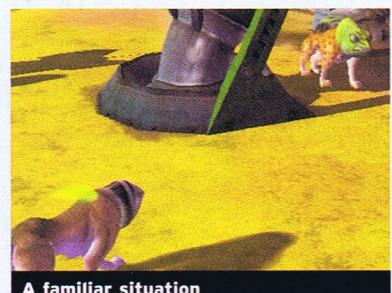
The technology tree in IC is my no means the deepest in the genre. Plenty of other RTS titles give players more range and variety when it comes to different types of structures. Research tends to simply allow buildings and henchmen to perform more efficiently which translates into tasks being executed more quickly. In IC, they are seen as a means to an end rather than being an integral gameplay element; the focus is squarely on combining creatures and then

sending them out to wreak havoc.

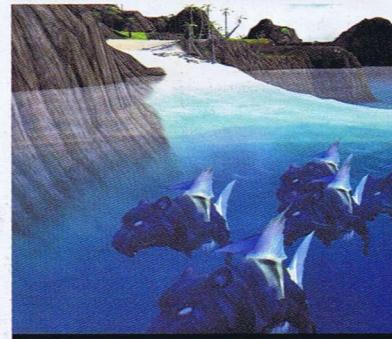
Although IC features 52 different base creatures with which to play mix-and-match, players can only keep nine creature combinations for production. This isn't as big a drama as it might sound, as players will find that they keep coming back to the same three or four unit combinations. Effectively, so long as players have a solid mix of ground-based units employing melee and ranged attacks, plus an airborne force of creatures with ranged attacks, victory is not too far away. Amphibious and sea-based creatures feature less importantly in the overall scheme of things and tend to be used only to launch surprise attacks from beachheads and riverbanks.

Haven't I seen this before?

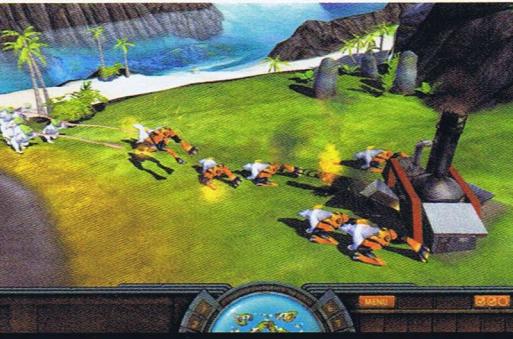
Apart from this aspect, map design and terrain don't really play influential roles in IC, and only affect gameplay in minor ways. In both the single and multiplayer modes, players usually begin the game from a reasonably defensible position



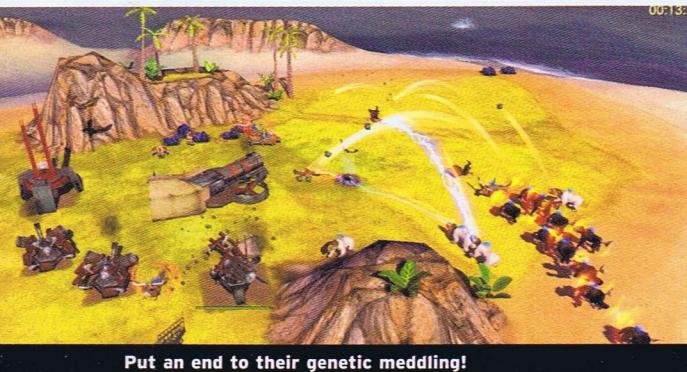
A familiar situation



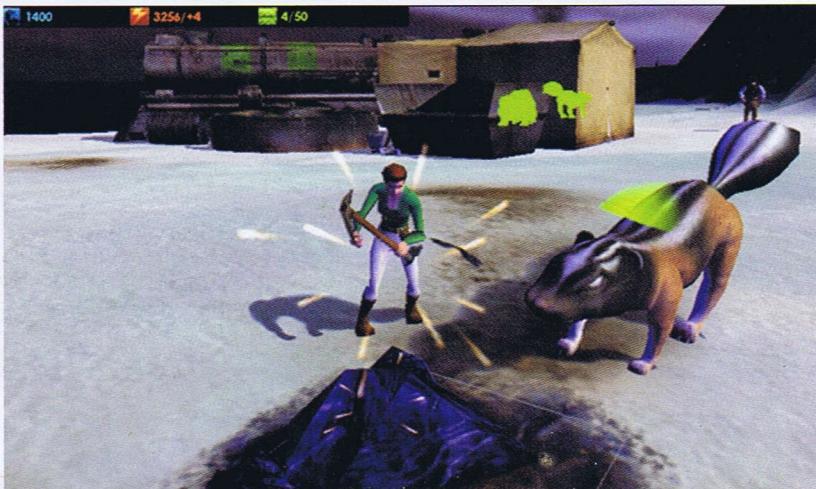
Swim dear? No thanks love, I just ate

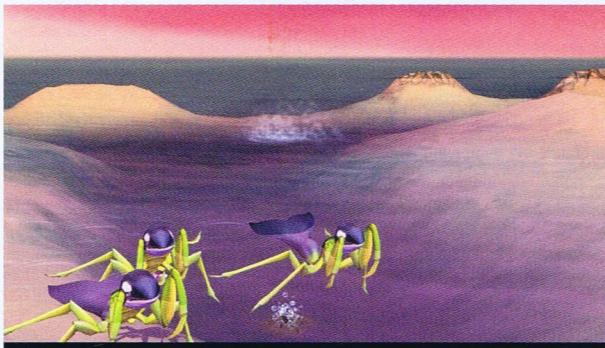


This looks especially unpleasant



Put an end to their genetic meddling!





Mantis whales. Now I've seen everything

with initial sources of coal not too far away. From there, the overall design of the map doesn't tend to drastically influence your overall strategy.

While the maps don't have a huge impact on gameplay, the four distinct environments are all beautifully textured and an easily controllable and zoomable camera makes appreciating the detail a breeze. Similar graphical goodness can be found in the creature models, impeccably rendered by the combiner engine. It's a credit to the developers that the hybrid creatures actually look like a genetic possibility rather than some toy animal that's had its legs and head ripped off and swapped around by some bored kid. Needless to say, they are all excellently animated.

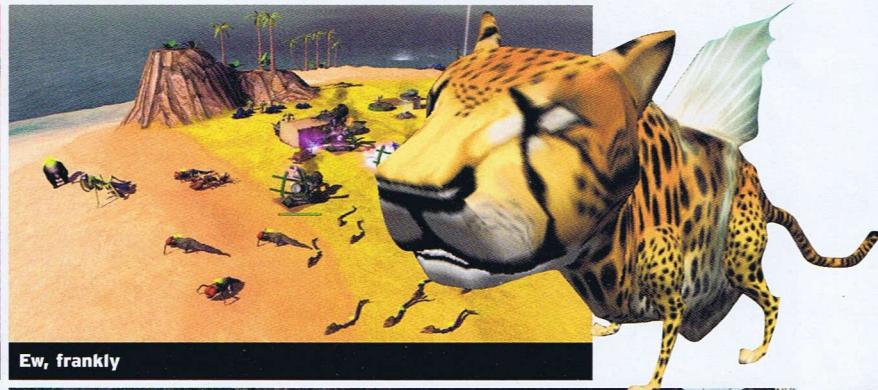
Apart from some annoying soundbites which the henchmen repeat ad nauseam every time they are selected (thankfully they can be turned off), the voiceovers are the sound stars in IC. Each of the main characters deliver their lines with gusto and personality. The music is equally first rate, a mix of jazz and swing that suits the time setting perfectly. Sound effects are a little on the ordinary side and could have used more attention.



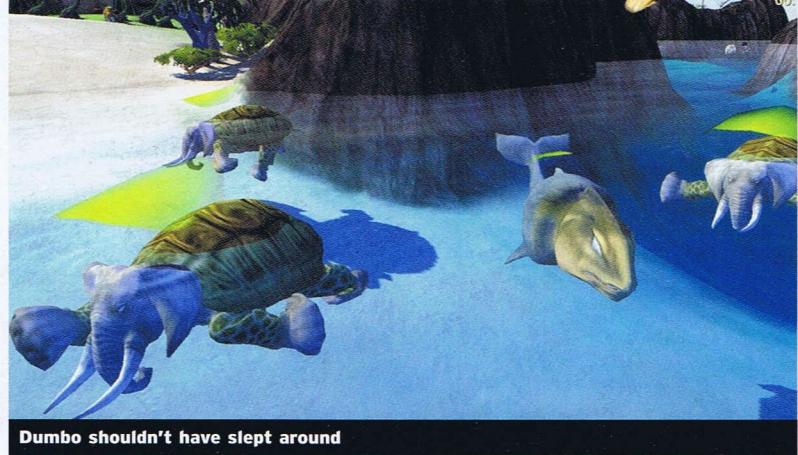
Thomas' new gig was going well



The Usual Suspects 2



Ew, frankly



Dumbo shouldn't have slept around



Stalked by freaks in a Winter Wonderland

RATING

FOR

Custom units
1930s flavour
Multiplayer

AGAINST

Short campaign
Resources
Trad RTS

OVERALL

Surprisingly traditional,
given Relic's Homeworld
legacy but still a
competent RTS with one
or two new flavours

86

Poor pioneers

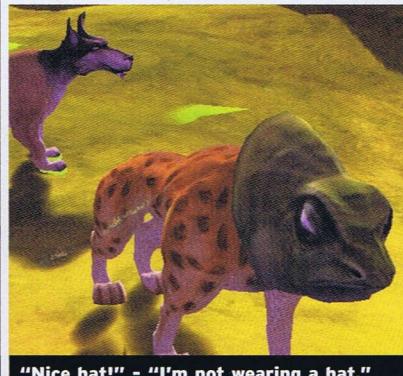
I get the feeling that Impossible Creatures suffers a little from being the first to introduce such a pioneering feature to the RTS genre, which will be copied and bettered by others. It will no doubt be imitated in spades, perhaps using dinosaurs or mythological creatures, and the potential for add-on packs or downloadable extra base creatures is endless. However, it

seems as though too much emphasis has been placed on the creature combination, to the detriment of other elements. Take that away and IC plays much like any other competent RTS; certainly no catastrophe but optimistic players still yearn for a RTS where all gameplay elements shine equally brightly.

Derek Lee

NAMING RIGHTS

When still in development, Impossible Creatures was originally titled "Sigma: The Adventures of Rex Chance". While to most gamers it would seem apparent which one of the two is the less cheesy, that wasn't the only deciding factor. It turns out that Relic got into a bit of a bungle with a Japanese company that had trademarked the name Sigma for its video gambling machines. Since the trademark office made no distinction between video games and gambling machines, Relic backed down. Right "choice".

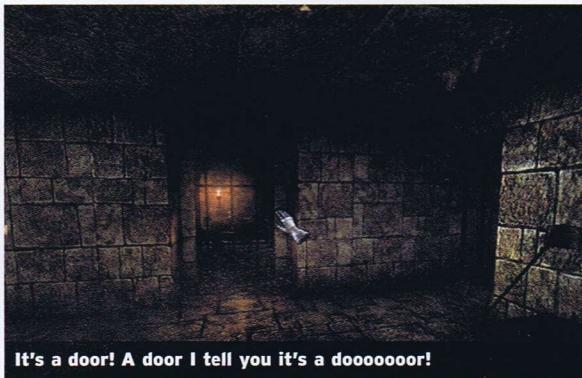


"Nice hat!" - "I'm not wearing a hat."

Arx Fatalis

Developer: Arkane ■ **Publisher:** JoWood ■ **Distributor:** Red Ant ■ **Price:** \$89.95 ■ **Rating:** M15+ ■ **Available:** Now

Ultima Underworld at last has a worthy heir



It's a door! A door I tell you it's a dooooooor!



Suddenly I feel like a hamster

I've just put down Arx Fatalis to write this review, and I'm tired. It was a bad start: I found myself in a Goblin gaol, with no memory (maybe my name is Jason Bourne?), everyone wanted to kill me and I'm was nearly naked. Wow, where have I seen that before? That's right, everywhere - but wait! This time it's special! I can nearly touch that beautifully rendered wall! It's perfect - the lights are down, the Gale speakers on the Pioneer amplifier are cranked, and the 19" flat screen has sucked me right in. I can almost forget that about 120,000 other games have had

I can just about touch that beautifully rendered wall!

the same beginning, because the action and ambient sounds and the beautiful textures have captured me. It doesn't matter that I'm trapped in yet another castle that could be named Wolfenstein, because this is an absorbing role-playing journey.

Arx Fatalis is truly a role-playing game. Yes, there's plenty of sword wielding and you won't get far if you can't thrash about with a dagger. However, it's a first-person RPG and the only times you'll see yourself are when you're falling to the floor mortally wounded, or you check your stats in the detailed Character Information screen. Like most RPGs, you may be a well-rounded naked amnesiac who can toss a troll when the situation demands, but you're equally at home casting spells and doing a bit of cooking on the side.

Kick off

Arx is a city on a world which was left without a sun when it spluttered and died. The population retreated underground to the warmth of the deeper recesses of the planet. The four main races of Humans, Goblins, Trolls and Orcs tried to co-exist but by and large they had a fairly thin time of it unless it suited them to cooperate. Those moments of cooperation will prove to be a blessing to you throughout the game.

Of course, this idyllic lifestyle couldn't last, and the evil Akbaa and his sidekick high priest Iserbius started some nefarious activities that you were sent to sort out. Your mission, since you chose to accept it, is to lose your memory and your belongings and start over in the dungeons of Arx.

Once you wake up you find an ally in an adjacent cell who suggests a few tips to get you going. These tips, through both characters and help text continue throughout the introductory levels while

LEVEL WITH ME

Like most RPGs the game consists of levels. These levels are more like levels in a structure rather than levels of expertise (although these exist too). Unlike many it is not a simple linear progression through those levels. Often you'll traverse a level several times while completing a quest. It is these quests that drive much of the game. These quests are given to you by other characters and they intertwine with further characters, and so on. For example you are asked to ask the trolls to clear some rocks. The trolls won't help because someone stole their idol. The Goblins want the trolls back at work so they will help to some extent in finding the idol, but if you annoy them the treaty will be cancelled and they'll attack. If you find the idol the Goblins may have an insurrection internally and so on...

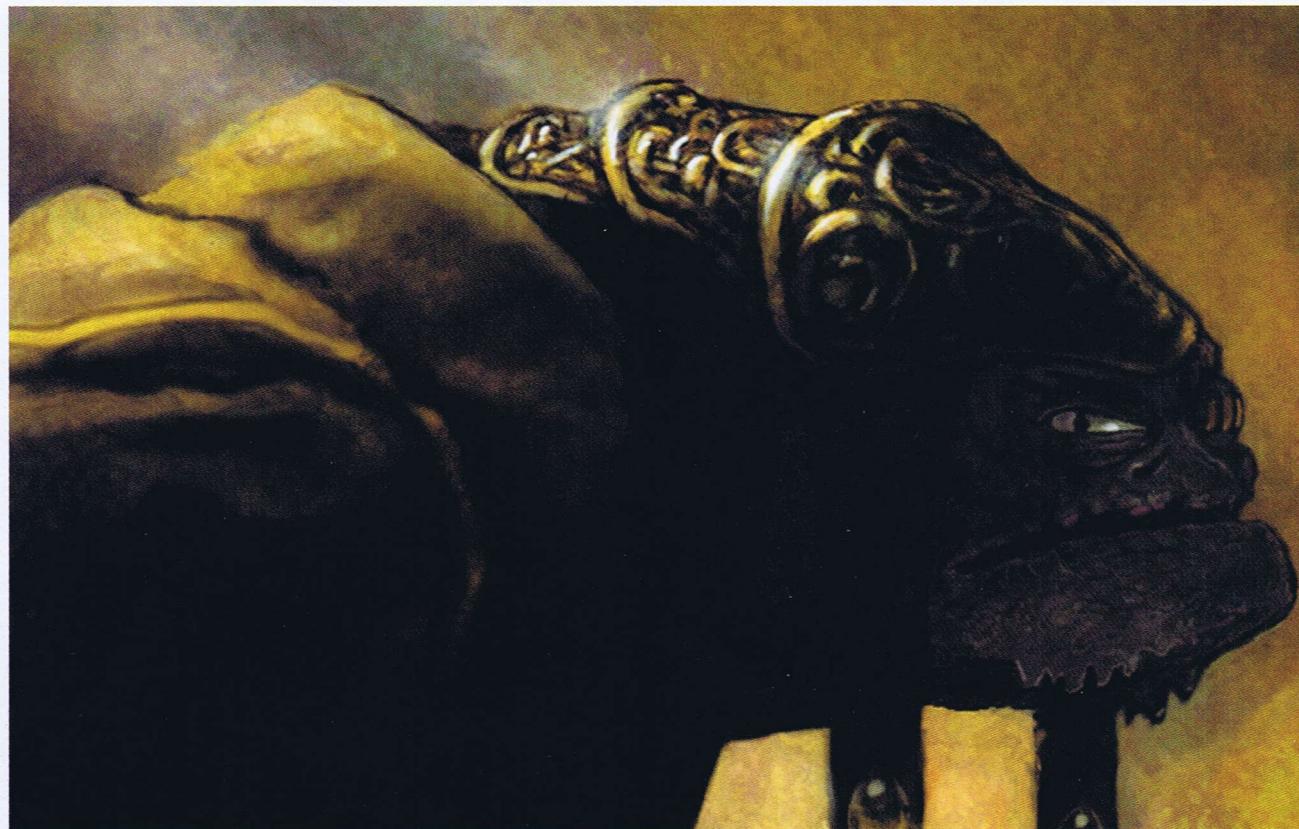


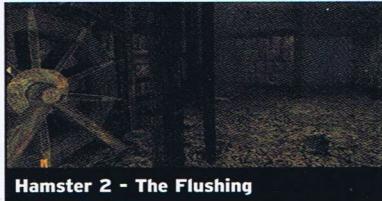
SYSTEM

NEED
P3-500
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard
1GB HDD

WANT
P3-1GHz
256MB RAM
64MB Videocard
1GB HDD

MULTIPLAYER
None

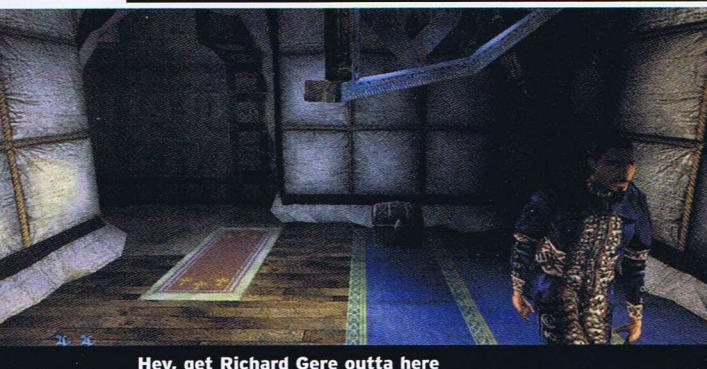




Hamster 2 - The Flushing



So this is life beyond the S-bend...



Hey, get Richard Gere outta here



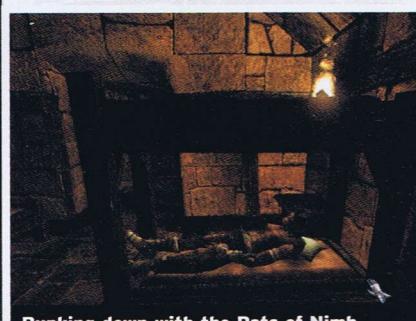
you start to come to grips with your character and his abilities.

Your character starts the game with a set of attributes and skills. At the start of the game you're offered a base character and some points to allocate as you see fit, or the computer can allocate them

randomly. Depending on your knowledge of the game you may as well let the computer do the work for you as it seems to distribute them fairly evenly.

There's a bit of an overlap between attributes and skills, but they can be broadly distinguished by their relative importance. The character attributes are Armour Class, Resistance to Magic, Resistance to Poison, Life Energy, Mana, Damage, Strength, Intelligence, Dexterity and Constitution. The skills are Stealth, Technical Skill, Intuition, Ethereal Link, Object Knowledge, Magic, Close Combat, Projectiles, and Defence.

The attributes influence the way your character behaves and responds during the game. For example, a high Resistance to Poison means that a spider will have a harder time poisoning



Bunking down with the Rats of Nimb

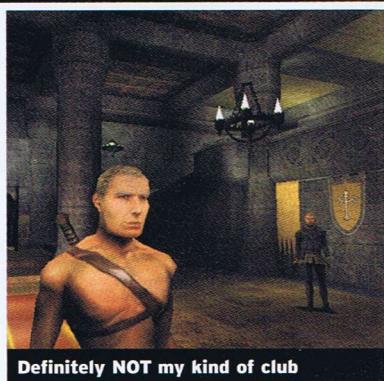


Meanwhile, the Ninja Gerbils scale the battlements



Jo Beth reaches for the RatSak

you, and you will recover faster. In fact, while you can use potions to heal poisoning, you will recover unaided if you can rest without further attack. The faster you heal the faster you can get on with things and defend yourself.



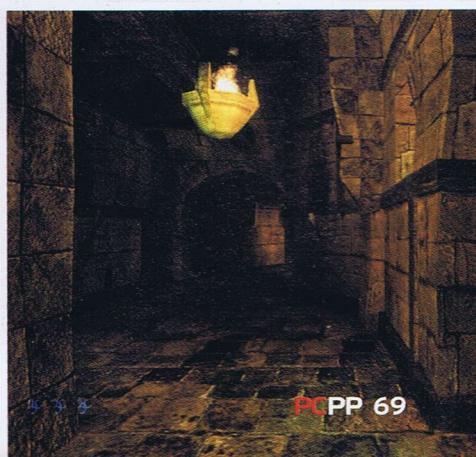
Definitely NOT my kind of club

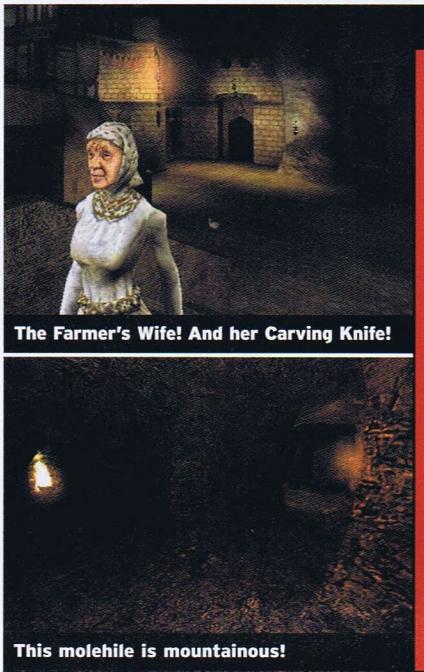
In Arx Fatalis you have all the features that you've probably ever wanted to see in one game

Controls

Controlling your hero is fairly standard fare for the gamer. The left hand controls forward and backward motion, as well as side steps, crouches, jumps, leaning and so on in a typical WASD configuration. The right hand is on the mouse, turning and operating the (preferably) three mouse buttons.

There are plenty of other important commands including those to examine your hero's current attributes and skills, reading the map, reading the journal, checking your magic book and doing a quick save frequently. On the topic of saving, if you do a manual save watch out and make sure you click the "save" link in the bottom right corner of the dialog box!





The Farmer's Wife! And her Carving Knife!

This molehole is mountainous!

SPELLCASTER

There are at least 19 runes with which you can cast spells. All spells require at least two runes and some may need four. Once you have the runes you can see how you should move the mouse while holding down the left button and the control key. As a result, casting spells takes time and it's prudent to have a few ready to go. You can pre-cast three spells which are then launched by hitting 1, 2 or 3 on the keyboard. The spells can start fire, fire missiles, heal, create food, protect, levitate, cure poison, raise dead, explore a place, summon creatures, freeze time and many more. You can cast spells as often as you have sufficient Mana, so long as you have the runes. You can also cast spells from scrolls even without runes, but these are one-shot and your scroll disappears. You can find scrolls very occasionally on some levels and they always seem to be there for a good reason.



Sorry sir, we don't serve rodents

generally you'll be happy to have the sound up loud throughout the game.

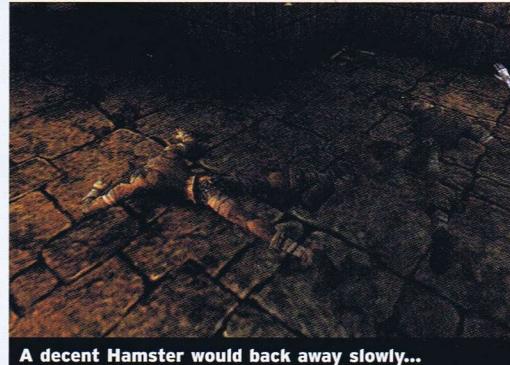
Gameplay

Having mastered the basics with the in-game tutorial you suddenly find yourself fighting giant rats, spiders, and Goblins of various sizes. These can kill you easily even early in the game, so it pays to read the manual carefully. Brute force is not always required and often you'll need to approach a situation in a way that will avoid a fight. Trolls, for example, are pretty benign, and you can stand next to one and chat all day. Once you've had a stab at them things can change quickly and you'll find yourself dead (did you press quick-save before you did something dumb?). Even on the levels inhabited by humans you'll be hunted down and killed if you swing your sword at the wrong moment.

Anyway, our naked hero has started his quest and found a bone to wave at the odd Goblin. After dispatching said Goblin you wander around more or less aimlessly looking at things. There are lots of things to look at, touch and take. You can carry quite a lot, but eventually your swag will be full and you'll have to consider whether you need the leeks and garlic quite as much as a long bow.

Your hero needs to eat and drink, and like us he doesn't like his food raw. You'll regularly come across chickens and rats that you can kill. They supply raw meat but you need to cook it before you can eat it. You can start fires very early on by casting a spell or use an existing fire. You lay the food to be cooked near the fire and a few seconds later you've got cooked chicken or rat ribs that you can carry or eat.

Along the way you'll find many, many things. These range from weapons to toolkits to medicinal flowers to food to fishing rods to flour and water. Some objects can be combined, and an important example is that flour and water combine to make dough, which you can bake by the fire to make bread. While objects of a similar type can be stacked, each object



A decent Hamster would back away slowly...

Video

Arcx demands a lot from your video card. The game is in 3D and there's a lot the developers would like you to see. My 1700+ Athlon with 512MB of RAM and a GeForce3 Ti200 struggled a bit at 1024x768 in 32 bit colour and all options turned right up. Dropping it back to 16 bit cured the small amount of stutter, but the designers have written it for 32 bit colour, so you make want to make your compromises elsewhere. The morning mists just don't look right in 16 bit.

An important tip is to bump up the Gamma one or two notches before you start. The manual describes the Gamma control thus: "Gamma: Adjusts the gamma value." Terrific. That sort of explanation is fine for discussing brightness, but Gamma is way more effective and far less

understood than brightness, so we could do without the superficiality. Apparently "gamma represents a numerical parameter that describes the nonlinearity of intensity reproduction." Whatever. Trust me, in any game you find a bit too dark, find the gamma and turn it up - you'll be a happier gamer.

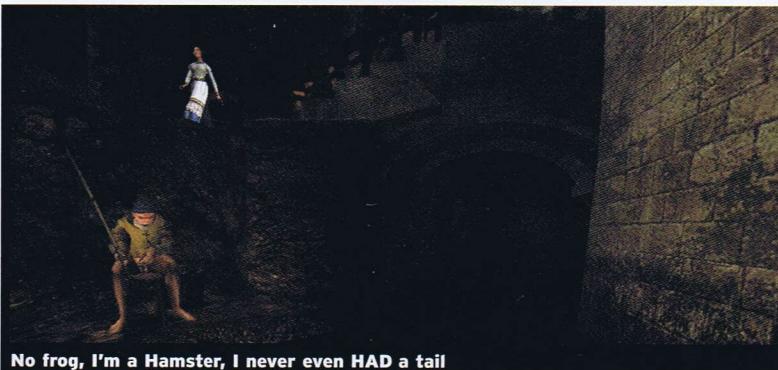
Audio

A lot of effort has gone into the sound effects and character speech. All of the samples are clear, crisp and worthy of a good sound system. The smooth stereo panning provides lots of audio cues allowing you to react appropriately all the time. EAX is supported (as is common in most major games today) and while I couldn't try it I suspect that it would make the great audio in this game simply excellent.

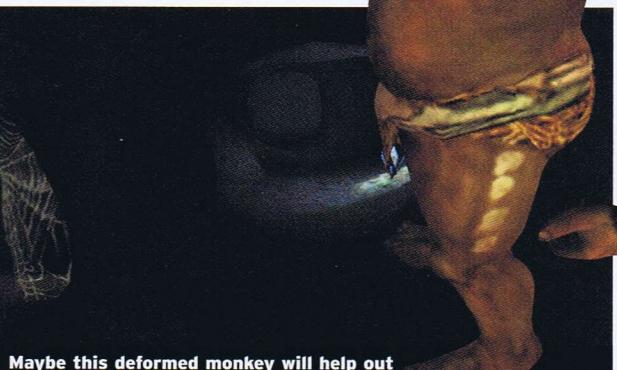
Each level has a general ambient sound running in the background. In the foreground you'll hear your footsteps, and as you discard your leather leggings for mail, you'll notice the jingle of mail as you walk. A few sounds and non-playing-character voices can get repetitious, but



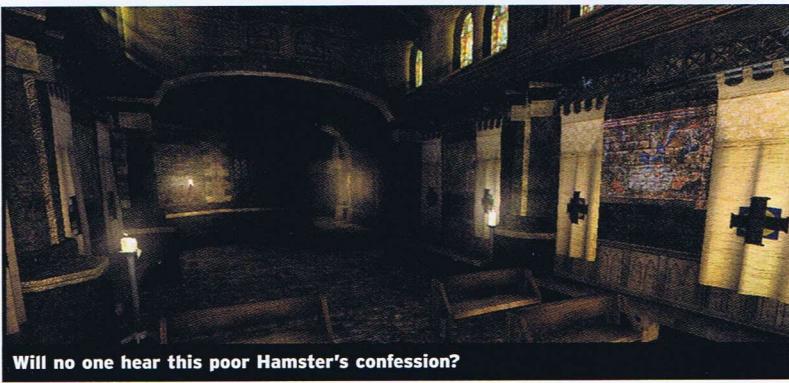
Oh great, a beagle. I guess he wants to see how I run



No frog, I'm a Hamster, I never even HAD a tail



Maybe this deformed monkey will help out



Will no one hear this poor Hamster's confession?



At last! Hamster revenge!

type takes up more or less space according to its type, and you'll need to discard things regularly. If you do this somewhere that you can easily find again you will do yourself a favour later in the game.

Creatures

The creatures are well developed visually, but they still suffer from the "glued-on-face" syndrome - although to only a limited extent. They move well and it is fairly easy to differentiate between, say, different species of spider, although you'll need a good memory to remember that the green ones were nastier than the purple (or was it the other way around?). Goblins, Trolls, rats and spiders appear frequently in early stages, but the manual warns of nastier things to come such as Rat-men, mummies, undead, demons, worms and dragons.

Those characters that speak do so clearly with accents, but important speech is always also shown in text. Often these speeches will be in the form of cut-scenes which are smoothly integrated with the rest of the game.

A few creatures are especially well rendered, particularly a few of the humans and the Sisters of Edurneum. Many characters continue to wander around open areas while you walk from building to building, but further conversations are rarely fruitful after the initial meeting. You'll quickly learn to pick these and not waste time talking to them. Some of them are just plain fun; one of my favourites was a beagle that I regularly fed rat-ribs.

Side quests

This is a big game even if you rush through it completing only the obvious quests. However, there are many side quests that aren't documented nor obvious, and only slow, methodical gameplay by an avid note-taker is likely to find them all. These don't appear to affect the final outcome of the game, but isn't taking your time what role-playing is all about?

Frequently it won't even be clear if

something is central or a side quest. After I eventually worked out how to talk to the Goblin king (you spike his apple pies with wine and then join him in the loo - how bad would that smell?) I found a device with rotating numbers. Would I try to find the answer? Was it important? Is that even the right question? Am I here to find and play a character, or just hammer through to the brief payoff?

Spells

Like a lot of other games (have I used that phrase before?) you have the opportunity to learn and cast spells. Arx Fatalis has learned a little from Black & White around spell-casting and it seems to work to good effect.

To cast a spell you use up Mana, which is replaced over time. However, you can only cast spells if you have the runes (carved rocks) which show you how to do it. A spell is cast by waving your hand (mouse) in certain sequences. You acquire these runes by either finding them, stealing from bodies or purchasing them.

Fighting

Fighting is hard work. Not only that, it's not always rewarding. While you're unarmoured and lightly armed you'll be easy prey for most of the nasties in Arx. So what's a hero to do? Initially you'll do a fair bit with your fists or a handy bone, but you can find daggers, swords and other axes lying around or on display on walls. But there's a catch - since you start with limited strength (as allocated by you) you may not be strong enough to wield a large sword even though you have the gold to buy it. As a result, your goal is not just money but strength also and that will only come with time and experience. Another important factor is dexterity, which determines how good you'll be with that big sword.

As you can see, a well-rounded hero is important to success. Take your time, allocate any points you earn carefully, and look for ways to earn that experience. At the same time you'll be earning enough points to advance to the next level.

Money

What would a RPG be without money? You can find it, steal it, be

given it or even earn it. With it you can buy things, get weapons repaired, get a drink or even gamble. Most really useful things are quite expensive, and carrying out quests is a good way to earn big money. However, sometimes you can mine jewels and sell them to dealers and as the game develops you can find other ways to get a dollar.

Bottom line?

Arx Fatalis brings together lots of elements that you've seen before, whether it be in Ultima, Wolfenstein (the original!) or Black & White. It stands taller than many because of that very fact - there's no hurry and there's lots to contemplate when thinking about, caring for and nurturing your hero. It doesn't particularly add to the RPG genre except in that you have all the features that you've probably wanted to see in the one game. Those looking for a 3D RPG with fighting, spells, concealment, an economy, poisons, great video and audio, levelling and lateral puzzles should apply here.

Andrew Calvin

RATING

FOR

Graphics

Sound

Lengthy gameplay

Depth of play

AGAINST

Not very original

Obscure puzzles

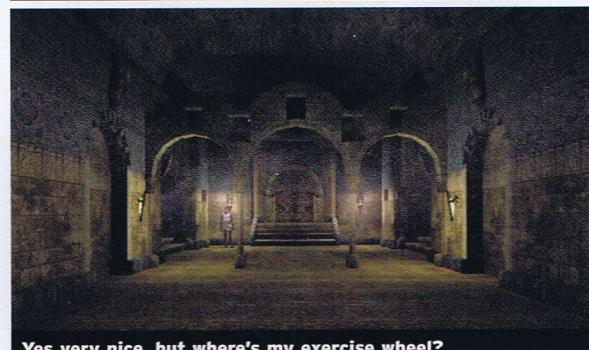
OVERALL

Like an Ultima Underworld flashback with modern graphics! One of the best RPGs of 2002

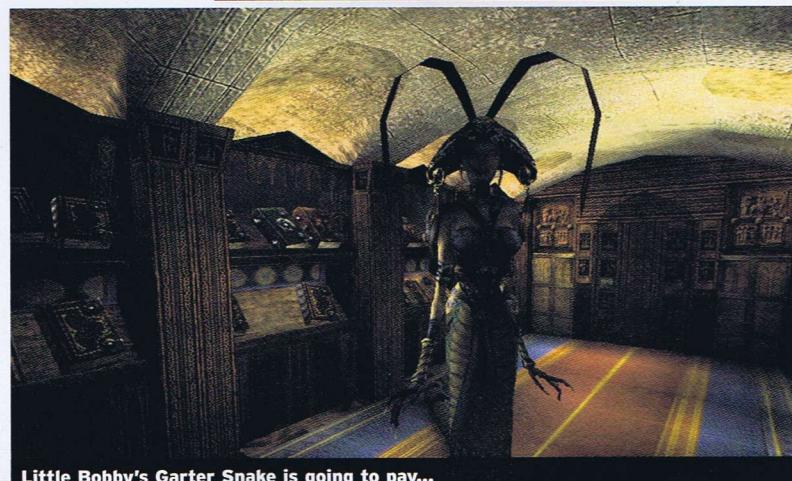
85



I hate people who keep toads. It's cruel



Yes very nice, but where's my exercise wheel?



Little Bobby's Garter Snake is going to pay...

Medal Of Honor: Spearhead

Developer: EA ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$44.95 ■ Rating: M15+ ■ Available: Now

This time, we're fighting them on the beaches

SYSTEM

NEED
P3-450
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard
Medal of Honor

WANT
P3-733
128MB RAM
GeForce2
Medals

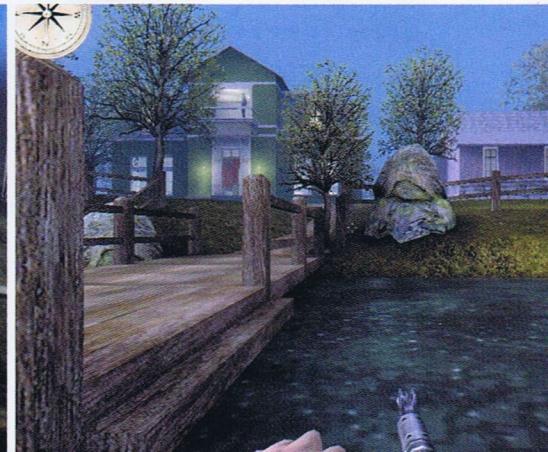
MULTIPLAYER
Yes

ONLINE

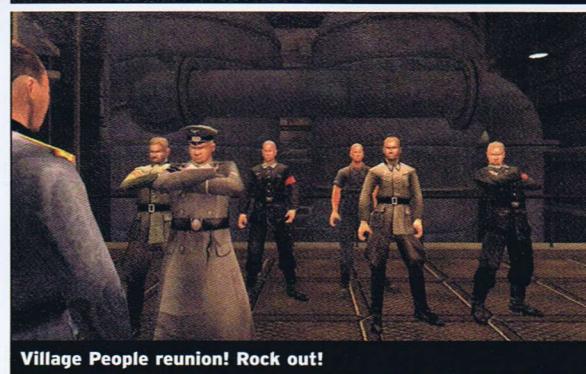
www.normandy.com
Wow! Is it an online memorial to one of the most famous landings in military history cunningly disguised as a mortgage company, or is it just a mortgage company?



VirginBlue needs to rethink its marketing strategy



Is that a rock or a pod creature from beyond the moon?

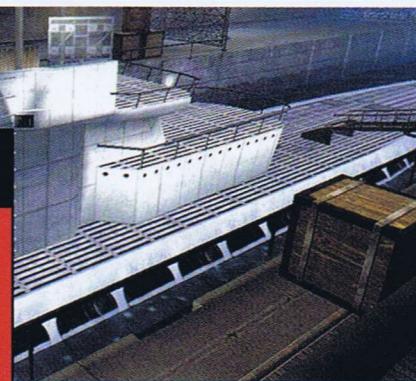


Village People reunion! Rock out!



NO ONE LIKES A SMART ARSE

Like the original game Spearhead suffers a little from enemy soldiers with seemingly superhuman skills when it comes to perception and rapid targeting. Fighting in closed quarters when you can rush an enemy and catch them off guard is plenty of fun in the game, but it is still annoying how damn trigger happy and accurate your foe is in wide open spaces. Merely think about breaking cover and showing yourself to the enemy in an attempt to move in closer so you can fire your weapon at a decent range and it gets very nasty fast. Before you know it bullets will be whistling past your head ricocheting off walls and making you wish you'd decided to chuck a sickie today. The enemy is annoyingly on the ball in wide open spaces, unrealistically so. It makes for annoying gameplay as you have to snipe away at your opponents very quickly relying on more than the occasional restart to get you through a number of encounters.



You remember that moment? The first time you stormed the beaches, took on the Tiger tank or made mincemeat of an enemy platoon using your machine gun and your ever-polished circle strafing technique. It was pretty special wasn't it?

Medal of Honor gave us oh so many sensational moments and if the game drew heavily on Saving Private Ryan then this

expansion pack, as you'll be in Berlin belting Jerry and get back stateside perhaps a tad earlier than you would have wished.

The singleplayer game might present a few issues to those of you who like a decent number of missions for your dollar. In Spearhead there are not even ten single player sorties in the game which means the more competent FPS warriors are going to rip through this game in less than a day or two and this might not be seen by many to be the best value in the world.

Not all bad

That said some of the missions, like the tense infiltration of German lines during the Normandy missions, when it feels like the whole Wehrmacht is gunning for your beleaguered outfit, do make for some pretty special moments. Tank encounters, which were a highlight of the first game, also

Spearhead is better than other games which have more missions but are simply not as much fun

expansion pack seems to have been up late most nights watching a lot of the ongoing serial Band Of Brothers, as Spearhead borrows more than a few missions from those featured in the TV series.

This is not necessarily a bad thing as the Band Of Brothers docudrama took us through many of the more exciting scenarios that led to the conclusion of the European part of WW2. Sadly though, it will take you more time to watch the eight-part series than it will playing the

make a return but because these are more common and you get used to dealing with them the tanks aren't perhaps as menacing as their brethren in the original game. It seems familiarity does breed contempt as you certainly get better at tank killing the more often you do it, and so these metal behemoths don't really excite they way they did in the first game. More is the pity.

On the positive side the scenarios are full of great moments and lots of behind enemy lines sabotage. You get to disrupt the Nazi cause by blowing up bridges, stealing vital secret documents and even stemming the tide of the last German offensive fling as you crouch in the snow and take the brunt of the assault in the Battle Of The Bulge.



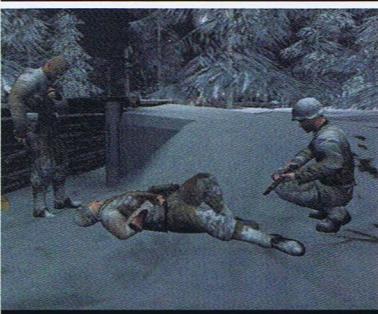
Well how do YOU think they saw us?



Damn foreign sportscars. Outta be banned

A SEQUEL?

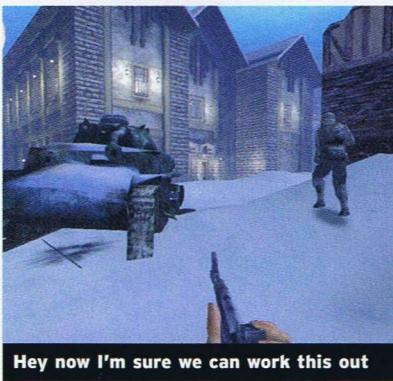
While there is no doubt that the MOH franchise is far from dead and that sequels will be already in the pipeline this expansion pack does rather rapidly take you to the end of the war with very little flow between missions. When compared to games like Half-Life or even Wolfenstein there is too much of a fragmented narrative. You feel like you have been teleported from one hot spot to another and there isn't really a sense of an epic ongoing struggle which you are living through. It is all too disjointed and lacking in overall plot development. The missions might be often good enough fun by themselves, but they don't really seem very intimately connected, and so the overall result is that you feel a lack of continuity which makes it hard to get particularly revved up by the campaign as a whole.



Hey Doc, can a man live with half a head?

Bloodless

Fans of FPS titles with a high corpuscle count will still find it hard to believe that this game is devoid of any crimson hues, but you can still knock enemies' helmets off which is some consolation. On the new toys side of the equation there is a smattering of new weapons like the Webley pistol and a Lee Enfield rifle for you to use against your schnaps-sniffing foe. You also get to control gun turrets in an on rails level towards the end of the campaign and you can even command a tank as you crush all who stand before you on the final drive into Berlin. There is the infiltration stuff at the start of



Hey now I'm sure we can work this out

the game too during the Normandy phase.

This all adds variety to the mix, but Spearhead would be better if these varied missions were more evenly spaced out with a healthy spread of the sort of stuff which kept us so enthralled in the original game, so the meal is more than a mere snack. The variety may be there, but you will tear through the game so quickly you won't have really appreciated the smorgasbord of divergent mission directives.

There are some multiplayer enhancements which go some way to compensating for the overall shortfall in the singleplayer experience. There are ten new maps for you to explore and go to war against flesh and blood foes. These are pretty good with the new Tug Of War mode being pretty similar to Double Domination in the recently released Unreal Championship. You must hold multiple areas for your team in order to win. Different to the original release, but hardly ground-breaking.

Continental

The game also makes a multinational fist of presenting the European War. There are Soviet soldiers with their thick Russian accents and the Poms who manage to sound almost polite as they engage in the organised slaughter of the enemy. They don't even screw things up nearly as often as their 21st century cricketing descendants. The accents are really quite good and the inclusion of these comrades from other countries does help spice up the action a tad as you work with your allies.

Spearhead is better than many other dull games which have loads more missions, but which are simply not fun to play. To be sure there will be moments of ballistic bliss as you go through the campaign, and some elements like the intense fire-fight in the Ardennes forest against a seemingly



Forget him Doc, look at me I'm dancing!



I must get this canned pudding to the nuns!

resurgent Nazi Assault force during the Battle Of The Bulge, are hugely entertaining. But then like the flash of a distant artillery barrage the excitement is all over and you are left with an empty feeling. Sure you have survived, but it all felt a little too easy and brief to make for an epic tale.

Steve Polak

RATING

FOR
More tanks
Varied missions
Europeans!
AGAINST
Too short
Not long enough
Kind of brief

OVERALL

Nicely executed but just not chunky enough to justify the \$45 outlay

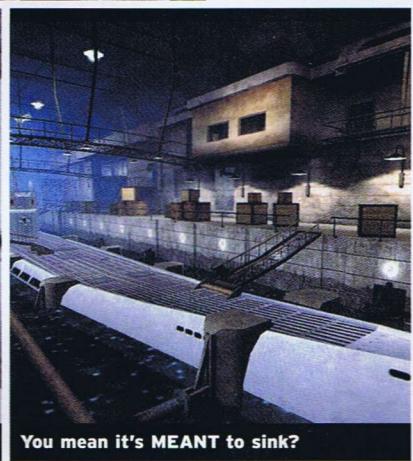
74



A charming pastoral this ain't



Okay Brown, you've shot your last Quartermaster

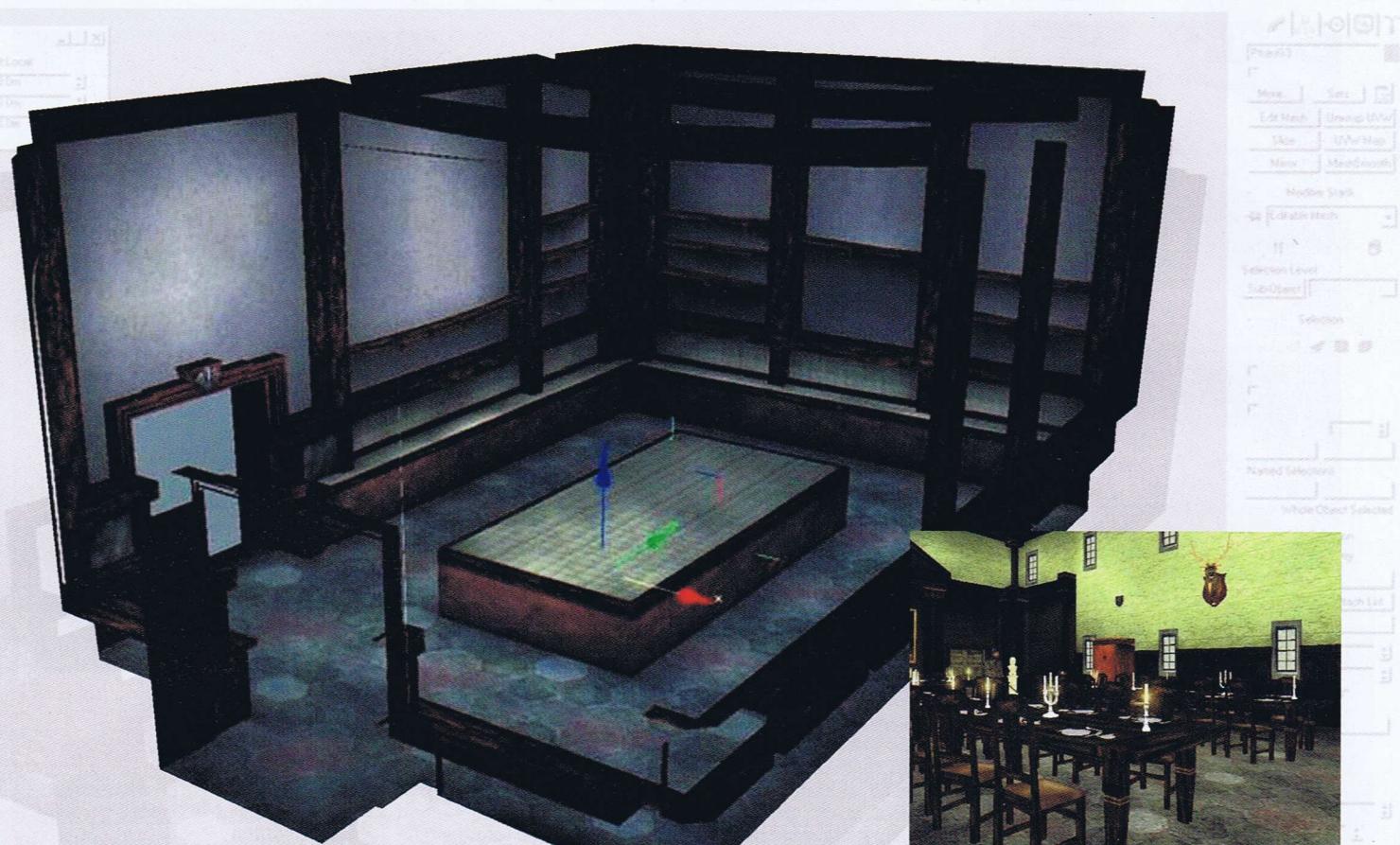


You mean it's MEANT to sink?

Prisoner of War

Developer: Codemasters ■ **Publisher:** Wide Games ■ **Distributor:** GameNation ■ **Price:** \$79.95 ■ **Rating:** M ■ **Available:** Now

Not as bad as bamboo under the fingernails, we promise



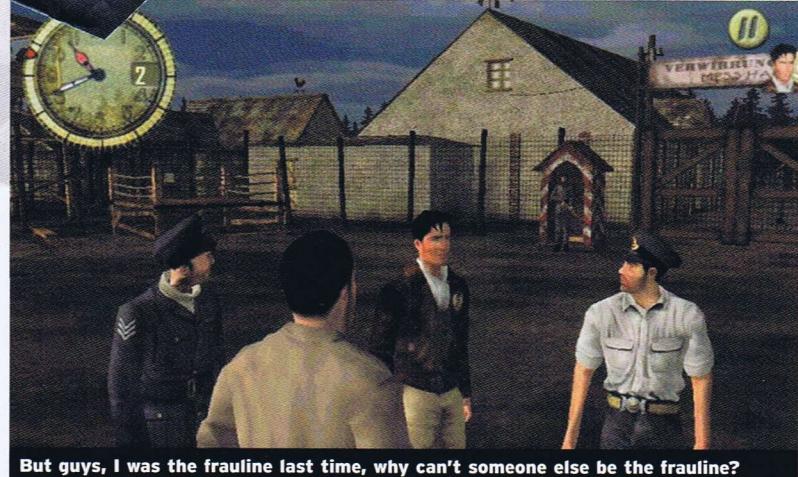
With the slew of unoriginal World War II frag-fests currently flooding the market, it's about time something unique came along. While shooting up Nazis is both fun and satisfying on so many levels, the novelty does tend to wear off fairly quickly if you're essentially doing the same thing time and time again. On that note, allow us to introduce a World War II action title with a twist, Prisoner of War.

With POW, developer Codemasters has taken a very interesting angle in the sense that rather than sending you into the front lines of the battle itself, Prisoner of War begins with you trapped inside a Nazi war camp and the main objective being to escape unharmed. This is a welcomed change from the usual "bust into a series of Nazi war camps and clear them of anything that breaths" approach and while you do get to see the occasional hint of gunfire, much of the focus is centred around stealth rather than run and gun.

Plucky lads

The story begins with Allied pilot Captain Lewis Stone and his co-pilot Lieutenant James Daly being shot out of the sky while on a top secret reconnaissance mission over German airspace. Bailing out just in time, Stone parachutes straight into the hands of armed German soldiers. Out numbered and out gunned, Stone is forced to surrender himself to captivity in a POW camp.

Naturally, Stone immediately begins to devise an escape plan, however, with a strict routine and multiple daily roll



SYSTEM

NEED
P3-500
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard
400MB HDD

WANT

P3-800
256MB RAM
GeForce4
400MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.hogansheroesfanclub.com
A fairly self-explanatory URL we trust. In any case if you remember this series and you got questions, they got the answers

But guys, I was the frauline last time, why can't someone else be the frauline?

Both suspenseful and at times highly difficult as you not only have to get around unnoticed, but always back in time for roll call

calls, things certainly aren't as easy as Stone's stiff upper-lip British pig dog arrogance expected.

Knowing your enemy

For starters, following the prison's tight routine is critical if you're going to make it out of the camp alive and thus, each escape attempt must be timed so that it doesn't

interfere with roll call and meals or the guards will be put on high alert and you will no doubt be sent to the cooler or sickbay depending on how stubborn you are.

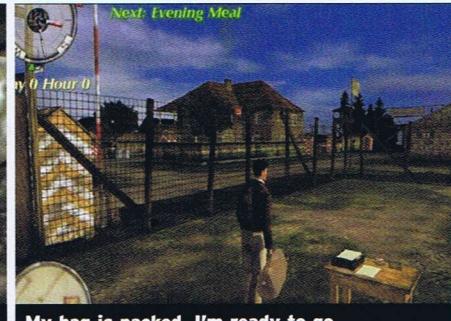
While this setting sounds all too familiar to the likes of high-stealth titles such as Thief, Prisoner of War is very different in the sense that rather than knocking out an inattentive guard and



Maybe I can charm them with my well-pressed chinos



This jackhammer? Not mine officer



My bag is packed, I'm ready to go



Oh, that's going to leave a scar

shooting your way out of the compound, there is barely any violence going on at all, making POW all about patience, logic and timing. For example, one of the earlier missions requires you to sneak into the guard's quarters and steal a crowbar that you will use to open a storage room, as well pocketing any other "currency" you can find. Due to the fact that money isn't much use to someone in jail, cigarettes and alcohol is the currency that the prisoners deal in and you'll often find yourself using this to help gain favours or information from fellow inmates or crooked guards. Moving back to the story, in order to enter the guard's quarters it is essential that you memorize the patrol route of a number of guards, making sure that none of them see or hear you enter. This is both highly suspenseful and at times, very difficult as you not only have to enter the quarters unnoticed, but rush back to the prisoner's area in time for roll call as well.

Couple the fact that you are required to monitor both tower and ground level guards with tight enemy AI and you have the groundwork for quite a challenging game indeed. That said, you are guided by

a handy onscreen radar showing the positions of each of the guards in your immediate area as well as their field of view, allowing you to accurately plan every move without having to guess whether or not a guard can see you.

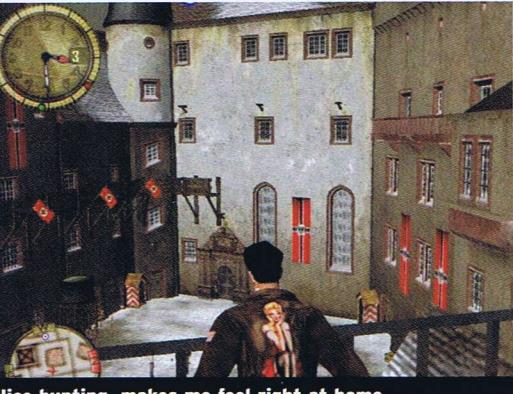
Field of view

For the most part, the action in POW is viewed from the third-person perspective; however, first person also comes into play while performing a number of tasks such as peeking through keyholes. As well as this, although slightly cumbersome, POW's controls are fairly intuitive with the usual WASD keys being used for movement and the mouse for aiming and looking around. Stone can also perform various other actions to help him manipulate the prison environment including crouching, crawling, wall climbing, tapping on walls to cause distraction, looking through keyholes and even peeking around corners in order to avoid blindly running into a pack of sub-machinegun equipped guards.

However, the third-person camera isn't as forgiving as we would've liked, with looking around corners often being a very difficult task to accomplish unless you press up against a wall and use the peek key. This camera issue has plagued many past third-person games and is an even greater issue in high stealth titles where knowing your enemy's every move is imperative to your success.

Looking the part

Compared to other recently released action titles such as Mafia, No One Lives Forever 2 and Hitman 2, the visuals in Prisoner of War aren't exactly spectacular, however, this does little to detract from the overall atmosphere as there are still some reasonably attractive weather effects as well as convincing day/night cycles, detailed models, and lighting from



Nice bunting, makes me feel right at home

SLIPPING PAST THE GUARDS

Sometimes it's simply not possible to sneak past certain guards and thus, Stone must resort to other methods of blending in. At night, becoming nothing more than a shadow can be as simple as applying a coat of boot polish to your face and donning a pair of glasses. However, seeing as most of the action takes place during the day, boot polish isn't exactly the most effective way of camouflaging yourself. Thus, in some missions you may be lucky enough to find yourself a German guard uniform which comes in very handy for fooling guards from a distance - as long as you don't attempt to talk to any of them! Walls, trees and bushes also play an important role in Prisoner of War. If you happen to see a nearby shrub, rush into it immediately as no matter how close a guard gets to you he will not have the slightest clue that you're there. Although this detracts from the game's realistic nature, it is both an essential and understandable liberty as the game would otherwise be way too difficult to hold enjoyment levels for more than a couple of hours.



Bite me

RATING

FOR
Innovative
Challenging
Pleasing enemy AI
Suspenseful

AGAINST
Annoying camera
Poor voice-acting

OVERALL

A unique WW2 sneak-em-up that, aside from a few annoying issues is an enjoyable game.

73

Asher Moses

Bandits: Phoenix Rising

Developer: Grin ■ **Publisher:** PanVision ■ **Distributor:** Manacom ■ **Price:** \$59.95 ■ **Rating:** M ■ **Available:** Now

Where Road Rage is a good thing

SYSTEM

NEED
P3-450
64MB RAM
32MB Videocard
700MB HDD

WANT

P4-2GHz+
256MB RAM
GeForce4
700MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.bandits.com
Yes! Ice hockey!
The Buffalo
Bandits! Pain!
Blood bouncing on
ice! And best of all,
big manly men with
even bigger,
manlier mittens!

Car combat games can be said to have had a chequered past, but only if you picture a chequerboard where all the squares are black. Car combat games just don't work. The only exceptions, like Deathtrack, were palatable only because the main focus was on racing, not on shooting, and so the essential awkwardness of the combat model was hidden somewhat by the lust for first place.

The Interstate games - 76 and 82 - were particularly poor examples of this troubled gaming niche. Plagued by poor controls and a sluggish 3D engine, gameplay consisted of little more than endlessly circling what appeared to be a cardboard box painted up to look like a Dodge Interceptor, while the bland hills spooled by in the background.

The problem has to do with the rigid nature of three tonnes of armoured metal with guns strapped to the roof. In reality, a car is not a very manoeuvrable machine, especially compared to a jet fighter or a Quake 3 warrior. So car

combat gameplay is all about trying to bring your weapons to bear on an enemy, and continually circling as he zooms out of your field of view.

Walls came tumbling down

So then, surely Bandits is absolute rubbish by definition? Interestingly enough, no. While the game has numerous problems, the central issue of the unworkability of car combat has been quite effectively dealt with. But first, some context.

It is, of course, the future. There has, of course, been an apocalypse. The world is, of course, a blasted wasteland dotted here and there with the camps of various whackos, oddjobs, and zany road pirates with comedy accents. There is only one city left, it's called Jericho, and it's surrounded by an enormous wall liberally studded with canon turrets.

Everyone wants to get in, but no one can.

Some folks, however, have embraced life in the wilderness. Our heroes, Fennec and Rewdalf, are bigwigs in the Wolfpack, a group of desert raiders. An inseparable team, they are the driver and turretman respectively, and are very interested in rumours that have begun to circulate about the existence of a very special weapon called the Phoenix, which could tip the balance of power. So the quest begins!

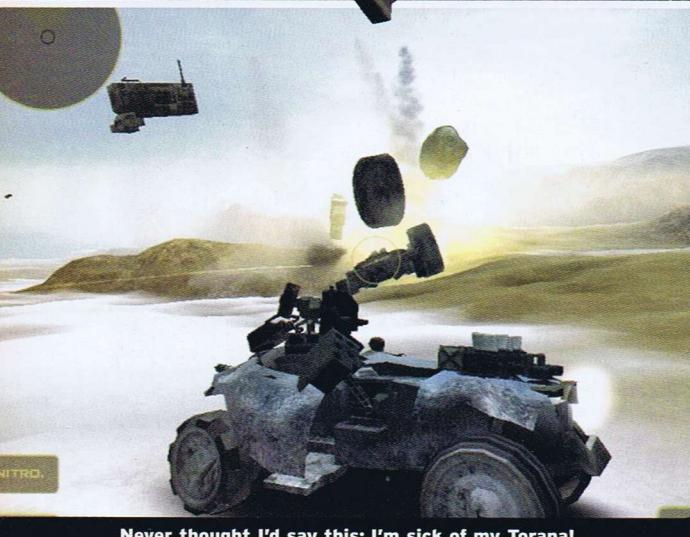
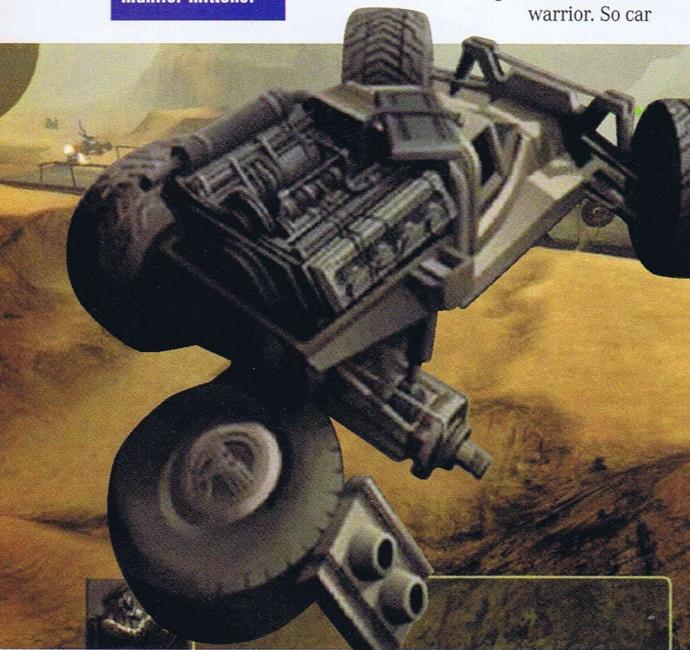
It is the two-man system of car combat that helps Bandits avoid many of the problems other games have faced. As mentioned above, car teams consist of a driver and a turretman. The driver obviously steers the vehicle and handles acceleration, while the turretman takes care of weaponry.

SPICE OF LIFE

While the core gameplay of Bandits is simple, the mission design is varied enough to keep you ploughing on, if only to see what crazy thing you get to do next. Briefings are conducted with a simple voiceover and a cameo image of the character speaking displayed at the bottom of the screen. These cameos also appear for the in-battle wisecracks that Fennec and Rewdalf, as well as any allied vehicles, will make every time they get a kill. It's very Wing Commander in this respect, and this simple technique really helps you feel that you're not alone out there. Missions range from simple point A to point B dashes to hunting down 'gatekeepers' to open drawbridges, to escorting and raiding convoys. There's even a mission with no driving at all - instead Rewdalf is given control of a wall-mounted cannon turret and must hold off raiders while Fennec repairs their car. The mix is welcome and will keep the wolves of boredom from the door until the frustration at some of the difficulty-through-dodgy-design gets to you.

Each car in Bandits has a top-mounted turret gun which can be equipped with either a rapid-fire machine gun or a more powerful but slow-firing cannon. This turret can swivel and tilt independently of the car's heading and allows the turretman to track enemies even as he blows past them at 60kph. There are also a number of fixed weapons mounted at the front, sides and rear of the car, including such things as a chaingun, a super heavy gauge shotgun, and the ubiquitous rocket and grenade launchers. The rear weapon is reserved for a rather ineffective minelayer.

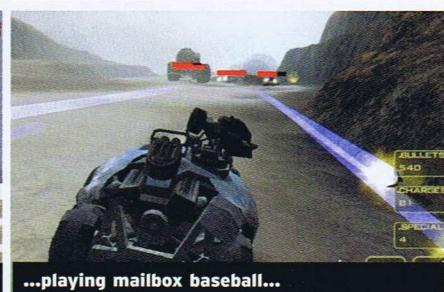
The central issue of the unworkability of car combat has been quite effectively dealt with.



Never thought I'd say this: I'm sick of my Torana!



Cruising for burgers...



...playing mailbox baseball...



..dragging the squares...



...collapsing drunk at 11am



Blockies or mainies?

Torana circle-strafe?

The front weapons can be selected as in an FPS such as Quake 3, and only one can be fired at a time. However, if both front weapons are the same, they will fire in unison, allowing for double missile or grenade attacks. The turret can only hold one weapon, and this is fired with the left mouse button. Right mouse fires the fixed weapons, and WASD steers the car.

It's possible to steer the car using the mouse as well; the turret will turn left or right rapidly and the car will bring its nose around to follow according to the turning speed of the car selected for the mission. It's also possible to unlink the turret from the steering, so it can turn completely independently and the car can only be steered with WASD. It's this second methodology that allows for circle-strafing - a first for car combat but vital in this game.

Missions stay true to the tried and tested Wing Commander model - drive to a location, destroy the enemies lurking there, drive to the next location. There are items which must be collected, and there are occasionally escort missions and convoy raids. There's also a rather anomalous race in the early part of the game, which is interrupted by an enemy ambush, so your placing becomes irrelevant anyway.

It's hardly revolutionary stuff, but the unpretentious gameplay coupled with a very attractive 3D engine keeps it entertaining. The sense of beetling across the hardpan in your deathbuggy to unleash a torrent of missiles against a clustered group of enemies is satisfying, and the wasteland is dotted with enough blasted structures and remnants of the old world to remain more or less engaging, although a few more trackside objects wouldn't have gone amiss.

While many missions are stupidly

difficult, further frustration is added with occasional suspect map design. One particular mission tasks the player with driving a long circuitous route to a clifftop overlooking a gate powered by a generator. It's necessary to shoot over the gate to destroy the power station, but the actual cliff is not quite big enough to comfortably hold the player's car, and slipping off means a five minute journey across half the map to get back again - and this is in the very beginning of the mission, and death in later areas means having to do this treadmill-like clifftop sequence again and again. If the clifftop had been made just a little bit wider, the experience of playing the mission would have been that much smoother.

Buggy love

Bandits has a retro feel to it - despite the state-of-the-art graphics engine, the gameplay is very reminiscent of the good old days of simple missions, simple story, and cute two-dimensional cut-out characters. Does the driving model really work? Well, the sensation of speed is not the greatest, but explosions are suitably meaty and there's plenty of flying debris so overall yes. Beyond the physics though, there's simply not enough variety in enemy units, but the curse is taken off this by creative and varied missions. All in all, Bandits would be a real contender if there was just more of it - as it stands, it's a solid diversion left in the dust of all the real classics.

Justin Hoffman

RATING

FOR
3D engine
Personality
Combat model
AGAINST
Suspect design
Lack of unit variety
Almost too lean
OVERALL
A lack of in-game content is glossed over by the first truly useable car combat model for PC

83

LESS IS LESS

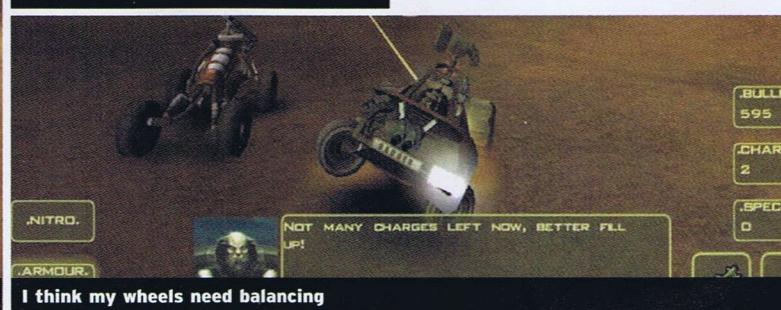
Sadly, Bandits eventually falls down due to a lack of content. While the missions are varied, nothing much else is. Every landscape is wide and brown. There are only a handful of different enemies, and only three factions: the friendly Crusaders, and the enemy Flaming Pumpkins and the Enclave (okay, there are four if you count the player's own Wolfpack). There are only three driveable cars for much of the early game, and these are unlocked very early on, so the incentive to keep playing to get more gear is sadly not there. It's a shame, because the backbone of the game is very strong, it just needs a lot more icing on the cake (And here we leave the metaphor mixmaster - Ed).



This road needs roadwork



Slippery when wet, that's me!



I think my wheels need balancing

NBA Live 2003

Developer: EA Sports ■ **Publisher:** EA ■ **Distributor:** EA ■ **Price:** \$89.95 ■ **Rating:** G ■ **Available:** Now

Turn your hoops dreams into (virtual) reality

SYSTEM

NEED
P2-450
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard
300MB HDD

WANT
AthlonXP 1500+
256MB RAM
64MB GeForce2
Gamepad

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

ONLINE

www.nba.com
Look why even try
to resist it? Lay
back in the warm
lapping waters of
Big Sport, and
indulge in
US\$40million shoe
adverts

Five or ten years ago, with Michael Jordan in his heyday, and exciting new moves, attitude and trash-talking hitting our TV screens for the first time, the game of basketball experienced an enormous explosion in popularity Down-Under. As time went on, the sport's popularity inexplicably petered off somewhat. Possibly us southerners find it hard to relate to the trash-talking, tattoo-sporting gangsta-rappers of the modern NBA, or maybe those youngsters that once dreamt of basketball stardom (this writer included) simply lost interest when they failed to grow into six foot eight African Americans.

Either way, NBA Live 2003 brings the Yankee version of the modern game onto your PC. It's a lot less effort than playing the real thing, and a good deal more spectacular too.

So what's new?

This version offers much the same options as in the past. Game modes include exhibition matches, season campaigns, practice mode and even a franchise mode, complete with fantasy drafts and player trades. The most unexpectedly enjoyable game type is playing one-on-one, which allows you to jive in a variety of street ball locations such as the beach, or local gym.

A comprehensive player-creation tool is available, and although it is easily adequate, the detail evident in some previous versions (e.g. ability to import textures) is unfortunately lacking.

With fatigue, injury and all the rules

'on', coupled with fouling frequency on 'full', the game is supposedly in 'simulation' mode. Gameplay has improved immeasurably over previous versions, partly due to EA Sport's 'Freestyle' method of control, although it must be said that the NBA Live 2003 still focuses on the spectacular rather than the credible.

White men can actually jump

NBA Live games have always suffered due to the incredible ease in which you can drive the lane and slam-dunk the ball. It's exciting to see someone pull off a huge slam over a towering centre, so more is better, right? Wrong. As you can expect, when it happens on every second play it loses its exclusiveness and gets repetitive, fast.

It's quite absurd that EA persists with this style of gameplay, as their Internet forums are crowded with complaints regarding exactly that problem



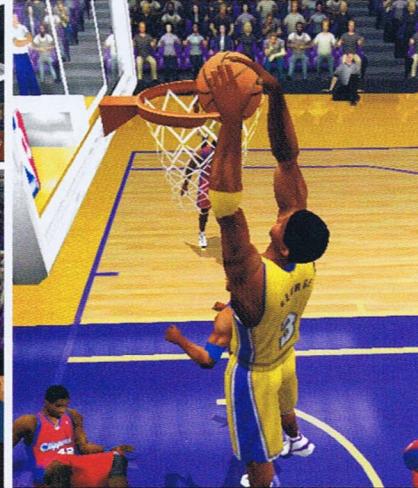
Double bogey!



Damn it boys, we just went over par!



Another wicket for my team!



A magnificent delivery



A beautiful cover drive from the off-side

A GAME FOR EVERYONE?

Basketball is one of few games that was actually invented, as opposed to evolving, and it has changed little since that fateful day in 1891. Seeing physical sports such as football being dominated by the biggest, strongest players, Dr. James Naismith decided to invent a game for everyone, where the players were to rely on skill and grace, not on strength and physical supremacy. Considering this, the decision to stick the basket ten feet in the air was probably not his biggest brain-wave. In a cruel irony, basketball's most dominating player - Shaq - stands at 7'1" and tips the scales at a colossal 152kg.

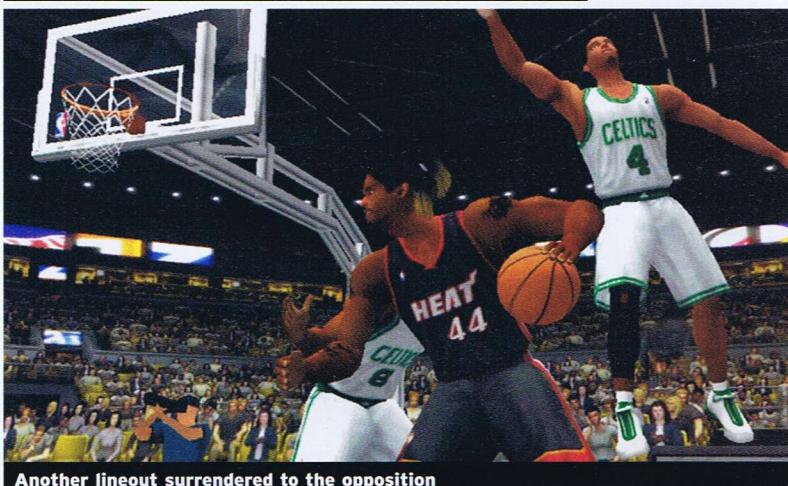


It's a lot less effort than playing the real thing, and a good deal more spectacular too

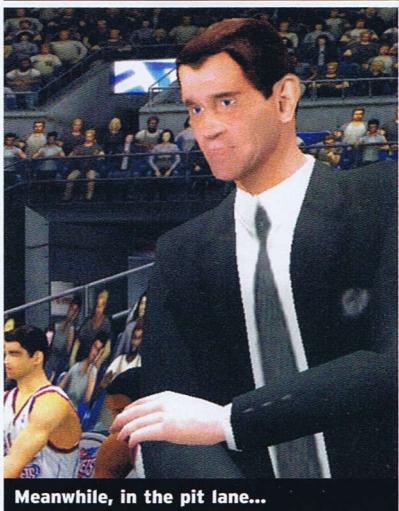
in previous versions. In fact, they have not only persisted with it, but they've added an extra dimension: shot blocking - if you can call the repetitive swatting of the ball twenty metres into the stands a 'block'. Just like an explosive slam-dunk, a huge rejection is something that happens rarely in real life, thus adding to the excitement when a player does actually do it!



Oh they've totally dominated this ruck



Another lineout surrendered to the opposition



Meanwhile, in the pit lane...

Nevertheless, this flash is markedly more subtle than past editions. The animations are much smoother and more lifelike; no longer do the players dunk with their hands a foot away from the ring. In addition, their past superhuman leaping ability has thankfully been scaled down somewhat, so they can no longer get chest-high to the rim. The dunk

animations are now quite believable, it's just the dunk frequency that's off.

More is the pity that with all these jaw-dropping, athletic slam-dunks providing honestly awesome looking replays, EA have removed the ability to save them! No longer can one amass their personal highlight reels in order to show off to

their cyber-basketball buddies.

Despite the user's players always dominating the league leaders in 'blocks per game' and 'field goal percentage', the statistics part of the NBA Live 2003 is recreated fantastically well.

Every little detail is recorded for analysis, from steals and rebounds per game, to how many points a player scores, to the exact location on the court they scored from - just to name a few! These details are smoothly blended into the commentary and TV-like overlays in an informative, detailed and lifelike manner. Basketball fans tend to be serious statistics buffs (well, buffs for basketball statistics at least), and this game will not disappoint.

Talkin' trash

The commentary in NBA Live 2003 is easily the best as far as basketball games go, although it does feature a few minor bugs. For example, the commentator will often get the names of the player that passed the ball, and the player that scored off the pass mixed up - 'pick and roll' plays seem to have them particularly confused. Just like any computer commentary, it gets repetitive after a while, but to nowhere near the same extent as other games. One excellent aspect of the commentary is that the announcers actually talk to each other and respond to what their counterpart says, as opposed to robotically spitting out seemingly random pieces of information.

As mentioned above, EA Sport's 'typical fashion' is to concentrate on glitz, show and eye-candy. Well, when it comes to the graphics, who's complaining? NBA Live 2003 is brought to life with silky, fluid animations, vibrant colours and detailed, distinct player models and likenesses.

Players are easily recognizable, even with the huge variance in facial expressions available. The stadiums are all beautifully rendered, complete with your actual bench players and coach on the sideline, and the crowd animations even further add to the atmosphere.

Not only does the crowd jump around and cheer, try and distract 'away team' free-throw shooters, or sit quietly when their team is getting beaten, but their attendance also varies. Expect a packed house in important games, but empty seats when struggling teams face up. This sort of detail is truly remarkable and goes a long way to create an engrossing experience.

Just like on TV!

NBA Live also features in-game cut-scenes that further promote the TV-like presentation. The action may cut to your coach bellowing at the referee after a foul, or bench players cheering a great shot. Moreover, when things are yelled from the sideline, it is clearly audible (along with on-court trash-talking) during play. The cut-scenes are a great idea, although they lack variety and quickly get repetitive.

All in all, NBA Live 2003 is an exquisite looking basketball game that - despite some predictable grievances - is undeniably fun to play. Although it may appear hard to beat, EA Sports can expect tough competition from Microsoft's less flashy - but much more realistic - 'Inside Drive' series, if they get around to porting it from Xbox.

Victor Webster



Own goal! Oh no that's very disappointing...

RATING

FOR
Awesome graphics
Smooth animations
Loads of features

AGAINST
Dunkathon
Too easy
Unrealistic

OVERALL
A beautifully rendered slam dunk competition, with a bit of well implemented basketball on the side.

88

The Chamber of Secrets

Developer: Knowwonder ■ Publisher: Warner Bros ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Dirty Harry is back, but did he fire six shots or only five?

SYSTEM

NEED
P3-450
32MB RAM
16MB Videocard
500MB HDD

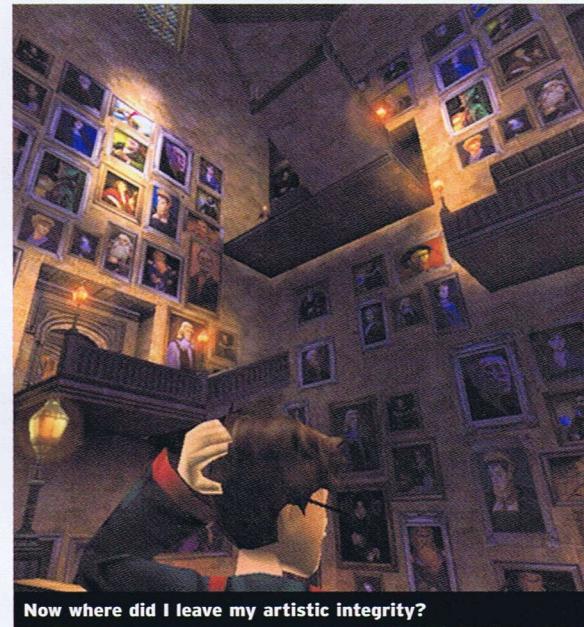
WANT
P4 1GHz+
64MB RAM
GeForce2 Ultra
500MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.hermoine-granger.com
You naughty person, having the hots for such a sweet little girl. Check out this site: it's crap, but it has some Emma Watson links



Now where did I leave my artistic integrity?



Tinkerbell is spinning in her grave



Picasso's later works: sellout

RATING

FOR
Lets fans play wizard
Has the book's feel
Spells fun to cast

AGAINST
Simplistic, repetitive gameplay
Slow load times
Few additions to what you've read

OVERALL

Tailor made for fans but ranks third behind the film and book itself.

74

The Harry Potter books have been widely praised by parents and teachers for bringing kiddies back to the wonderful world of reading in an age when the TV is more likely to capture their attention. However, J.K. Rowling's creation has become so popular that it has spawned the inevitable film and game spin-offs to mesmerise young fans and give them reason to avoid picking up another book. Ironic, no?

Like last year's Philosopher's Stone title, gameplay is still a fairly basic thirdperson adventure affair with a big emphasis on the treasure hunt theme. Scattered throughout the Hogwarts castle and school grounds are an assortment of magic beans and wizard cards which players will spend much of their time collecting. The beans can be traded with other students for all manner of items from potion ingredients to a new whiz-bang broomstick, while the wizard cards can be used to unlock secret areas.

Pottering about

The exploration elements will no doubt captivate younger players but provide little challenge for anyone else. Although there are plenty of hidden areas to locate, they are all quite simple to uncover. Casting spells at every mirror, statue and door that looks out of place invariably unlocks a secret area. The straightforward control system means that Harry can't really do much else apart from jump and climb over simple obstacles.

Learning spells is equally simplistic although the 3D platform sequence that follows where players get to try out their new enchantments proves quite fun. In these timed challenges to win points for Gryffindor House, players must negotiate a obstacle course while avoiding creature nasties, and magically manoeuvre switches and levers to reach their final objective.

The storyline will both please and annoy fans of the books. It sticks like



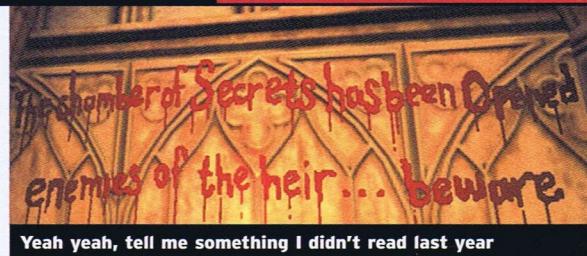
Hermione! You've got an afro!



State of Origin - the way it's played in my dreams

BROOMSTICK BATTLES

Quidditch is the magic world's number one sport, a mix between soccer and netball played on broomsticks. The Quidditch matches have been the main action highlights in the films, but sadly they are not a similarly spectacular feature of the game. As Harry, players have little control over their broomstick. Gameplay consists of using the arrow keys to try and follow and capture a flying ball known as the Golden Snitch to win the game. As much of the exciting action happening around the player has little impact, the whole affair is not the adrenaline rush it should have been.



Yeah yeah, tell me something I didn't read last year

super glue for the most part with 'new' favourites such as Dobby, Gilderoy Lockhart, and Moaning Myrtle to encounter. Avid readers will know how the game is going to unfold and have the ending spoilt for them, yet, they may just be too distracted to notice or mind as the game does a good job of creating the experience of being a student at Hogwarts. While it would have been nice for some extra tidbits to have been added, considering how jealously Ms Rowling guards her creation this was never going to happen anyway, so we're hardly surprised.

In the potting shed

The animation and character models are passable but what is really disappointing are the textured faces of all the principal characters. Rather than looking like the film's actors, they resemble two-sizes-too-small Halloween masks stretched over each character's skull. They're

hideous enough to give a seven-year-old nightmares.

While the music and effects are solid, the voice acting, particularly for all the student characters, including Harry, is dreadfully wooden. So instead of the witty John Cleese as Nearly Headless Nick and the brilliant Alan Rickman as Professor Snape, players are left with amateurish substitutes.

Chamber of Secrets will no doubt be a huge seller, but not necessarily for the right reasons. Although it lets diehard fans experience first hand the wonderful world of Harry Potter, the game's main elements are overly one-dimensional and too easy for anyone over the age of ten. Dare we say it, older players might find a book more interesting.

Derek Lee

Robin Hood

Developer: Spellbound ■ Publisher: Wanadoo ■ Distributor: Wanadoo ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: M ■ Available: Now

Apparently he's the legend of Sherwood

Robin Hood may have been the medieval world's number one philanthropist, but modern day audiences might not hold him in the same regard. Instead, all our materialistic and profit-driven culture can do is shake its head at some guy living in squalor and playing around in the trees without enough sense to hang onto some of the loot he manages to boost. Its no wonder prospective do-gooders would prefer to remain anonymous.

Robin Hood is similar to Spellbound Studio's previous endeavour, Desperados, and will also remind players of another squad-based strategy game, Commandos 2. Like those titles, the gameplay consists of controlling a small squad of characters to complete various objectives. The game keeps closely to the legend so well-known characters such as Little John, Friar Tuck, and Will Scarlet are all here in their tights-wearing glory.

Stealth Tights

The game places a big emphasis on stealth and planning over resorting to full-frontal combat. Like the man himself, players must take the moralistic high ground; killing too many enemies means losing reputation points, making it more difficult in turn to recruit potential

followers who might not warm to someone who appears as bloodthirsty as the Sheriff of Nottingham. As a result, the pace of the game is quite slow and will definitely make impatient players fidget restlessly.

Whilst the AI is smart enough to collect reinforcements and disperse patrols to hunt down players who leave bodies lying around, at other times enemy soldiers will stand idly by as their comrades are getting riddled full of arrows. The mix of different combat skills between party members and the clever melee system make for some enjoyable combat sequences.

Rather than employing a simple point-and-click interface, the mouse is used to trace sword swings. Moving the mouse in straight line towards an enemy executes a thrust whilst a figure of 'S' performs a spinning overhead swipe. Whilst some might see it as a lame attempt to mimic the real thing, the combat system wins points for ingenuity.

Tight Missions

Missions can generally be divided into three categories: basic ambush sequences played out in forest settings, objective-based missions set in the huge city maps which advance the overall storyline, and castle sieges. While the overall campaign path is open-ended, the least interesting and fun to play ambush missions are an unfortunate necessity if players want to enjoy much success with the other two mission types.

The rich 2D environments are filled with detail, from lowly peasant hovels to towering castle turrets, and really capture the medieval feel. While it's fun to watch the 2D sprites going about their daily affairs they are too small, tending to make



Medium Density Housing - the terrifying future



SYSTEM

NEED
P2-350
32MB RAM
8MB Videocard
300MB HDD

WANT

P3-450
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard
300MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE

www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk
Everything you need to know about Nottingham. Includes the minutes from council meetings!

MERRY MEN AT WORK

In this age of multi-genre games, Robin Hood follows suit and includes a useful resource management system. Between missions, players return to their camp within Sherwood Forest and will need to deploy their merry men to perform various tasks. These range from sharpening melee and archery skills, resting tired or injured troops, and ensuring that stocks of the limited resources remain at a healthy level. Whilst this feature plays much like a cut-down RTS without a technology tree, it's a nice addition and adds to the overall "outlaw" feel of the game as players take stock and rebuild after each mission.

RATING

FOR
Open-ended mission
RTS-style resources
Combat system

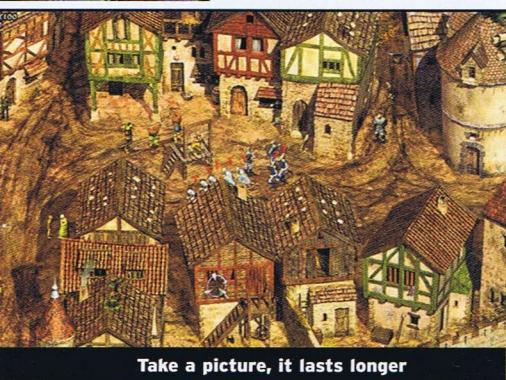
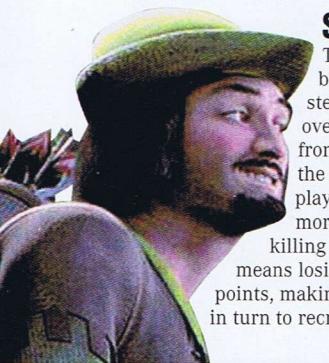
AGAINST

Inconsistent AI
Plodding pace
Sprites too small

OVERALL

A few problems don't completely kill off this solid strategy sword-fest

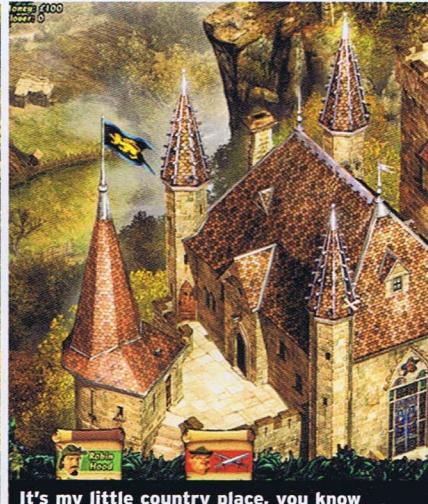
78



Take a picture, it lasts longer



But what if it rains?



It's my little country place, you know

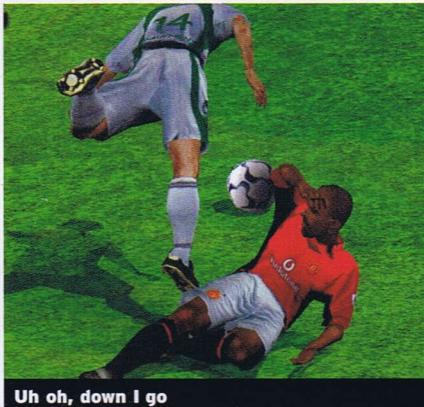


FIFA 2003

Developer: EA Sports ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now



For once, what's in the game actually IS in the game



Uh oh, down I go



Eeeeeek!

it down will result in a slightly different action (e.g. holding down the pass button punches the ball forward into space, while a tap is a direct pass to a team-mate). In addition, FIFA 2003 sports EA's much-hyped 'Freestyle' control, allowing special moves such as feints, one-touch passes and other razzle-dazzle.

SYSTEM

NEED
P2-350
64MB RAM
16MB Videocard
450MB HDD

WANT

AthlonXP 1500+
128MB RAM
GeForce2 Ultra
450MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

Yes

EA Sports seems to churn out soccer games at a rate faster than any other sporting genre. It's a wonder then that - in the past - soccer games have often seemed to lack the same polish evident in games depicting the American sports such as basketball and gridiron, especially considering that soccer is a vastly more popular sport. Well something's clicked at Electronic Arts, as FIFA 2003 is by far the best soccer game to date.

Teams and players galore

Although similar to FIFA World Cup 2002, the latest instalment offers a heap of new teams, available from most of the major soccer leagues and nations. There are 16 leagues in all, 350 official teams and over 10,000 players, which is really quite impressive. No wonder the game comes on two CDs.

Controls are the same rudimentary concoction seen in past releases. There are separate buttons for crossing, shooting, lobbing, passing and two for tackling (aggressive and normal). Tapping a button as opposed to holding

EA's strong point

The graphics are of Electronic Art's typical high standards, and FIFA 2003 showcases both more and better rendered effects, textures and polygon models than any other soccer game available. Streamers shooting from the grandstands, coloured smoke and TV-like score overlays on the playing surface are good examples of this attention to detail.

In addition, it wouldn't be stretching it to claim FIFA 2003's commentary is the most convincing out of every sport game ever made for the PC. John Motson and Ally McCoist talk and joke with each other, while also observing the match and even bringing up obscure statistics and gossip concerning individual players.

So far so good, but before you smash open your piggy bank, there are a few doozies that need also be mentioned. For starters, some "must have" big-name nations are missing, namely the Netherlands and Wales. Sure, Holland's World Cup campaign ended prematurely, but so did Australia's, and we're included. Wales are hardly a soccer superpower, but they recently beat Italy and are certainly a better team than many of the other international squads deemed worthy of digital fabrication.

While this may disappoint the Dutch and Welsh, the sheer numbers of other players and teams in the game is

SCREW TRADITION

The FIFA series is easily EA Sport's most true-to-life family of sporting games. After playing EA's basketball, boxing, NASCAR and rugby games, one could be forgiven for expecting FIFA 2003 to feature shots from bicycle kicks on the halfway line saved by a somersaulting keeper who just dived 20 feet across the goal face. Thankfully, there is no such extravagance in this game, just smooth, fluid and realistic animations and gameplay. This is a pleasant surprise coming from a company whose other sporting releases could be accused of being predominantly concerned with providing pretty screenshots for the back of the box.



But I WANT an ICE CREAM!

incredible and that considered, a few oversights may be grudgingly forgiven.

Furthermore, the game presented minor graphical glitches, which were exactly the same on three different test systems. Designing a game to support so many different videocards is bound to be difficult, but three crosses from three different cards is unacceptable.

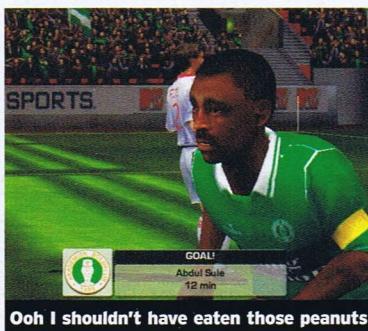
Too much of the same?

Lastly, FIFA 2003 may be criticised for being too similar to previous FIFA games - however, changes since FIFA World Cup 2002 (such as all the extra teams) are significant and only those expecting huge overhauls will be disappointed.

In summary, FIFA 2003 is an extremely impressive title, which injects a subtle, but pleasant helping of realism into an effortlessly playable, yet challenging and immersive soccer game. Considering the excellent graphics, commentary and atmosphere, small oversights can be easily forgiven, and when it's all said and done, FIFA 2003 is the best soccer game available for PC, hands down.

Victor Webster

90



Ooh I shouldn't have eaten those peanuts



Okay ball, I don't like you and you... well



Cover your gnads you fools!



Freestyle dance ROCKS!

RATING

FOR

Looks great

Sounds great

Plays great

AGAINST

'Big Names' missing

Small graphics bugs

Similar to FIFA 2002

OVERALL

The graphics, commentary and teams make this one a winner.

007: Nightfire

Developer: Gearbox ■ Publisher: EA ■ Distributor: EA ■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Rating: M ■ Available: Now

Can Q create some ingenious device to save this travesty?

Just as the majority of the population was starting to get sick of the James Bond franchise, Gearbox software has decided to grace us with yet another Bond game, 007: Nightfire. Being avid fans of the Nintendo 64 success that was Goldeneye, we were naturally excited when word first spread about Nightfire's development. As is the case with most Bond-themed titles, Nightfire's main plot has you out to save the world before evil super-villain Rafael Drake can destroy the Earth with the missile guidance system he's just stolen from the U.S. As always, there are plenty of scantily clad women as well as a plethora of gadgets ranging from a tranquilizer dart pen to the very familiar laser watch. Could this be the PC Bond shooter that everyone's been waiting for? Unfortunately, the answer is most definitely no.

Dumbass

For starters, Nightfire features some of the worst AI seen in a contemporary shooter as well as a completely flawed objective system. For example, the very first mission has you attempting to break into an enemy hideout by means of hiding in the back of an incoming supply truck. However, there's one slight problem - this is impossible to do without being spotted by one of the spotlight-equipped guards. Climbing into the rear of the truck won't work and hiding on top of the vehicle in a crouching position is equally unsuccessful as the patrolling guard sounds the alarm immediately. Heck, you can't even open the door and climb into the passenger seat as when

WEAPONS AND GADGETS

To aid Bond in his quest to save the world, there are a number of gadgets and weapons at your disposal. Available weapons include the Raptor Magnum - A heavy calibre handgun with a powerful shot and laser sight making up for the rather meagre clip size; the fully-automatic AIMS-20 featuring a computerized telescopic sight that can be switched between a powerful rifle firing 3-round bursts or a fast-firing grenade launcher; the Storm M9-32 lightweight machinegun and the Delta 900X pump-action crossbow with a telescopic sight for silent but effective killing (Charming - Ed). Additionally there are Q-gadgets such as the multi-purpose wrist watch, Q-Vision enhancement glasses (X-ray, Light Amplification, Infra-red), lighter concealed q-camera, PDA data-hacker and cartridge fired dart pen that add more substance to an otherwise mediocre run and gun style shooter. In total, Bond will employ more than 25 weapons and gadgets in the player's pursuit to save the world from the diabolical plans of Rafael Drake but it's unlikely anybody will be bothered playing the game long enough to experience any more than five.



Oh yeah, now I'm cooking

method which is even more amusing than trying to use a stealthy approach. Firstly, you are often able to stand nose-to-nose with one of the patrolling guards, who doesn't even notice you until his mate in the guard tower spots you with his searchlight. And even when he does start shooting nine out of ten shots miss you even at point blank range. Furthermore, enemies often tend to not only shoot each other, but are also oblivious to the cries of their mates being slaughtered right next to them. What's worse is that these annoying bugs continue throughout the whole game, with frustration continuing to build as you progress.

Cockroaches

Not only is the game bug ridden, but is also overly simple and linear, with either M (the "boss") or an onscreen graphic telling you exactly what to do and where to do it which leads to a very dull experience indeed. Nightfire's physics model is also a great disappointment, with a prime example of this being grenade blasts that are more often than not harmless against enemies standing as little as one meter away from them.

These obvious flaws are quite a shame considering the amount of cool gadgets and weaponry on offer (see boxout). Furthermore, Nightfire's graphics are equally stunning, with awesome level design, high polygon models, as well as some remarkable weather effects including effectively modelled rain and snow. Although there were a number of clipping issues such as being able to walk through the occasional object and bodies that sink into the floor, overall the visuals in Nightfire are spot on.

Put bluntly, it's glaringly obvious that Gearbox have rushed the release of 007: Nightfire to coincide with the launch of the latest Bond movie, Die Another Day, and the buggy game design, stupid AI and flawed mission model coupled with unnecessarily linear gameplay make Nightfire one game you should stay well away from.

Asher Moses

SYSTEM

NEED
P2-300
32MB RAM
16MB Videocard
500MB HDD
WANT
P3-700+
128MB RAM
64MB GeForce2
500MB HDD

MULTIPLAYER

No

ONLINE
www.007.com
It's the official site for the movies, with mucho gear to download including wallpapers of Halle Berry's midriff

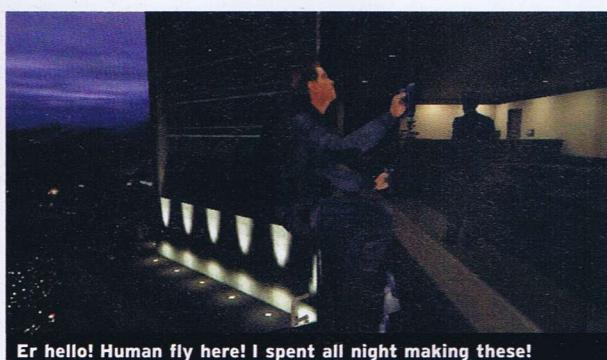
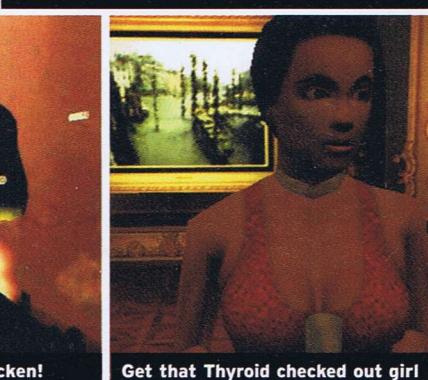
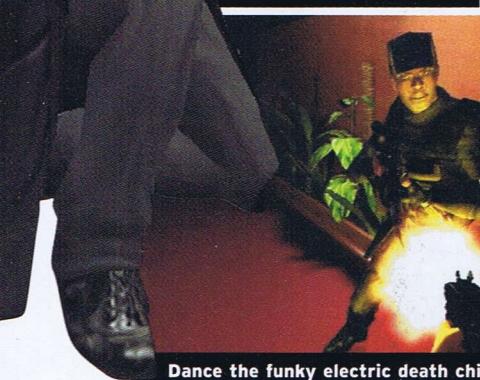
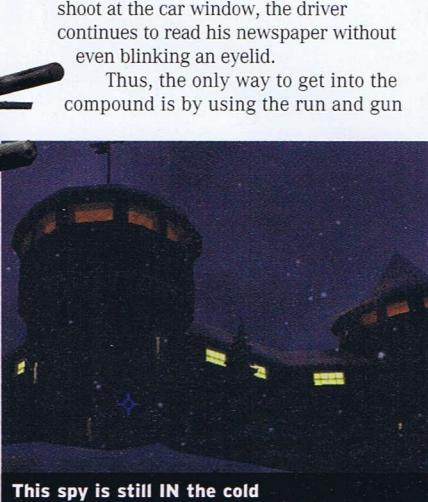
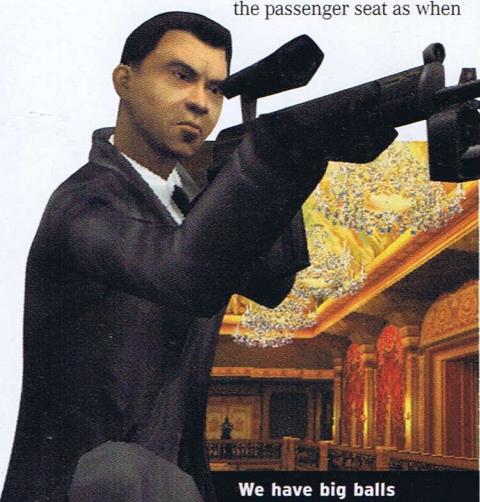
RATING

FOR
Graphics
Weapons
Scantily-clad women
AGAINST
Extremely buggy
Stupid AI
Way too linear

OVERALL

Bugs and design faults aplenty, but if you like gadgets you may not mind

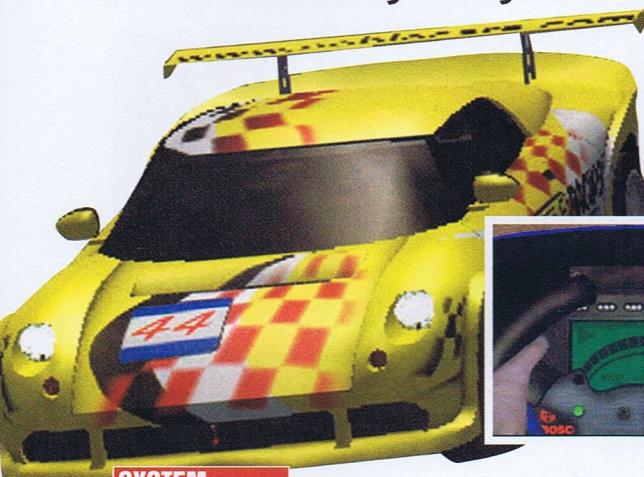
40



Total Immersion Racing

Developer: Razorworks ■ Publisher: Vivendi ■ Distributor: Vivendi ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now

Have fun angering the opposition



SYSTEM

NEED
P3-450
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard

WANT
P3-1GHz
128MB RAM
32MB Videocard
Racing Wheel

MULTIPLAYER

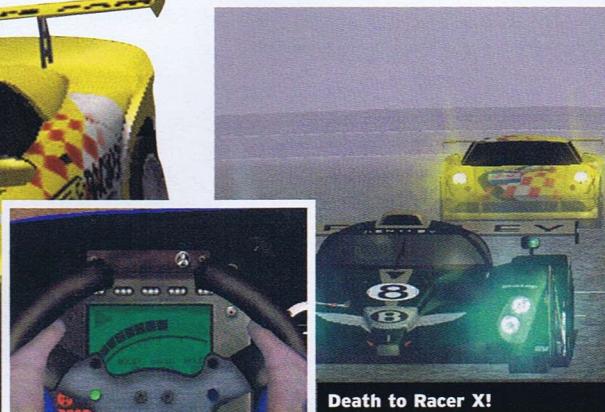
Yes

ONLINE
www.totalimmersionracing.com
Another totally bog-standard boring official site that won't tell you anything about the game you won't be able to figure out from the screenshots



A GOOEY GUI

The user interface looks pretty slick on first inspection, although graphical adjustments must be made using a separate configuration program. The mouse doesn't work in the in-game menus, which is irritating, and although it may not sound like too big a deal, when you have a steering wheel fastened to your desk in place of the keyboard, it can be a little awkward. To top it off, the PC-user's pet-hate of having to type by selecting individual letters console-style will also annoy some. Not that there's much typing involved, but it's the principle that counts - what do they think a PC keyboard is for, anyway?



have the ultimate dummy-split and 'accidentally' crash others out of the race. In all, this innovative idea is applied nicely, and supplies TiR with a major drawcard over the competition.

How about the cars?

There are no less than fourteen real-life cars available for racing, twelve of which must be unlocked by winning special challenge races (kind of like NFS's 'Hot Pursuit', just without the cops). Each of the cars has distinct handling characteristics, engine sounds and - I'm glad to say - cockpit graphics. The option to race with other camera views (including bumper and a few exterior angles) is also available, although the interior view makes the racing feel and sound much more genuine.

Each of the vehicles is modelled with extremely realistic high-polygon models, complete with dynamic shadows and 32-bit textures. The entire game looks a treat, but it's thankfully not just baseless eye-candy.

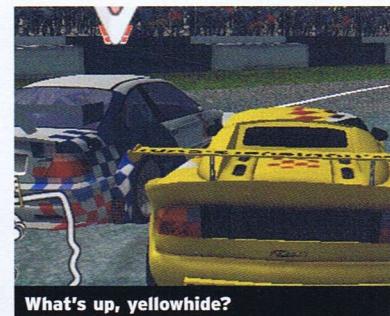
TiR's driving physics offer a satisfying racing experience.

While it's no hardcore sim, the game is convincing enough not to ruin the atmosphere, while at the same time, it remains adequately simple, allowing newbies to get straight into the action. TiR sports solid force-feedback capabilities, although

I had to reduce their strength slightly in order to stop the wheel jerking unpredictably around corners.

Razorworks has utilised creativity and intuition to produce a very solid racer. The first steps with truly human-like AI drivers have now been taken, but there's still plenty of untapped potential left in the idea, and it would be good to see other game designers taking up the baton and pushing the technology even further.

Victor Webster



RATING

FOR
Altitude
Career mode
Fun physics
AGAINST
Console GUI
Jerky FF
No damage!

OVERALL

The AI, no matter how limited, makes for a fresh and entertaining racer



81

Monopoly

Developer: Infogrames ■ Publisher: Infogrames ■ Distributor: Infogrames ■ Price: \$79.95 ■ Rating: G ■ Available: Now



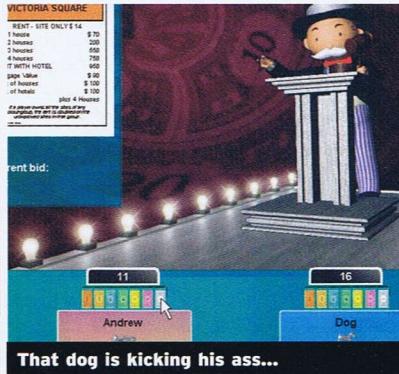
Where's the button to chuck the bank at my sister?

Do you remember family holidays, sitting around playing Monopoly with your parents, brothers, sisters, cousins, grandparents, uncles and aunts? Were they happier and gentler times rather than sitting in front of cable watching four hours of the Simpsons and later bunny-hopping around a Quake 3 map? Of course they were. That's why you need Monopoly, stashed safely away in some cupboard, not necessarily played very much but just there. In case. But since everyone has a copy of Monopoly, do we need a faithful digital translation of the boardgame? Does anyone in the world anyway ever come home thinking: You know what, I really need a quick run through Monopoly. Let us see.

Start up

Monopoly uses a 3D representation of the original board - there's no interpretation of the game like in Monopoly Tycoon. You can choose to play on the English board or on a board customised for one of 12 countries. For each country you can use the original local currency, the Euro, or British pounds. For some countries who have adopted the Euro it will be a nostalgic exercise. Nevertheless, the localisation of the boards is a little odd. For example, if you're playing on the German board you may get the Chance card to advance to Pall Mall! The computer knows better though, and will cheerfully move you along to Seestrasse. I also expected the localised versions of Gaol, Chance, Tax, Go to Gaol and so on, but these are always in English.

It also helps to have a mental image of the way money is laid out by denominations. When properties are being auctioned or you wish to trade with another player, you offer money by clicking on it in a representation of the money tray. You'd better remember that second from the left is \$100 (or 2,000 Kroner or whatever), because they're so small you can't read the notes. That sort of knowledge is only acquired by playing on a card table with your cousins and brother.



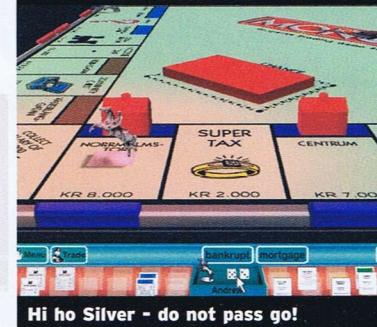
How does it look?

Once you get going the game is nicely animated. Clicking on "throw" zooms into the middle of the board where you can see the dice being cast in 3D. The game pieces are throbbing, just waiting to move and will do so according to their type. For example, the racing car will zoom around corners with tyre squeals, whereas the dog will twirl or somersault with delight and bark madly. While all this is going on the "game master" is narrating progress, reminding people whose turn it is and reading out place names and cards. "Press on, Iron" was funny the first time, but did wear out after a while. Fortunately you can customise the amount of sound and animation to suit. Mind you, there are nice touches such as the paddy wagon that collects your token and takes it to gaol.

Getting rich

The game helps you to do the things you'd normally do, such as collect and pay rent, buy and sell houses and hotels, trade with other players, and mortgage and unmortgage. They computer players will play with various levels of expertise, employing smart tactics such as mortgaging all properties on which they can't build, so that they can build as much as possible on those that they can. Rents are collected automatically, and the tedious process of mortgaging and adding up what each property is worth is easily done.

You can play with up to six players, but four is probably optimal. I played against five computer players and went bankrupt early. It was funny to watch the other five battle it out without me



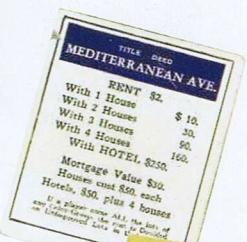
(He's easily amused - Ed).

There were some interface quirks - I hit Escape twice to check a menu, and it quit the game without warning or saving. A few other times I started something, such as mortgaging, but decided I didn't need to. However, I couldn't get back to the game until I finally mortgaged a property.

Monopoly on PC is an interesting exercise. It's certainly fairly well done, but it's a bit like building a model boat out of matchsticks; did it actually need to be done? There's a place for it, but the lack of a full-on bank fight at the end of the game, where the whole lounge room is swirling with red \$200 bills, really makes me want to power down the beast and get out the old board again for one more round of "do not pass go..."

Andrew Calvin

SYSTEM
NEED
P2-350 64MB RAM 8MB Videocard 100MB HDD
WANT
P3-450 64MB RAM 16MB Videocard 100MB HDD
MULTIPLAYER
Yes
ONLINE
www.monopoly.com Not an anti-Microsoft site! Visit, and be bombarded with pop-ups wanting to sell you even more ridiculous versions of Monopoly! Go mad!



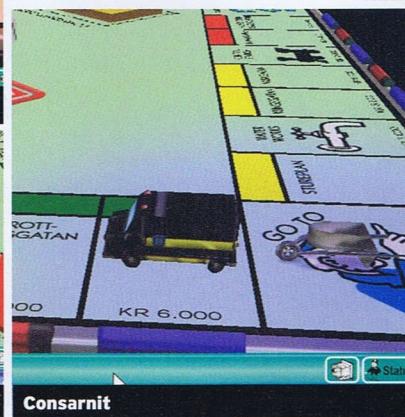
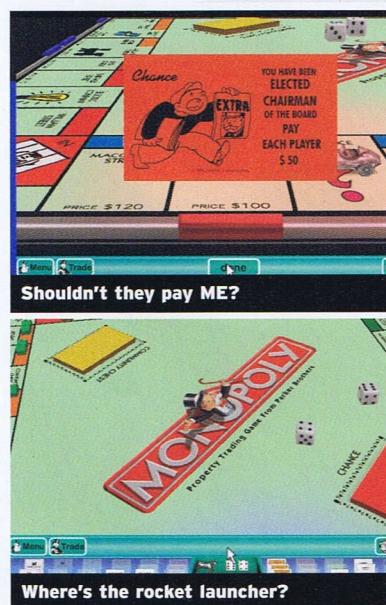
RATING

FOR
Animated tokens
3D board
Automated tasks
AGAINST
Blah music
Repetitive narration
Interface quirks

OVERALL

Exactly like the game except you don't have to pick up the bits afterwards

75



HOUSE RULES

Real Monopoly aficionados usually customise the rules. You can here too, and the options include a few I've not come across, such as Futures and Immunities. These allow you to assign future rent to other players or make other players immune to paying rent on a property. They could be useful in team based games. More importantly, you can speed up a game with higher salaries and initial cash, which usually help to get to the heart of a game faster. Imposing artificial shortages on houses and hotels can also lead to some interesting trades among players. Changing the number of houses required before a hotel can be purchased can also reduce the money supply and cause early bankruptcies.



HALF-LIFE Natural Selection

For: Half Life ■ Version: 1.1.0 ■ Size: 92MB ■ URL: www.natural-selection.org ■ Rating: 5/5

At first glance this looks to be a straight out Aliens rip-off. The setting is familiar: armed-to-the-teeth space marines taking on a horde of ugly, relentless alien beasties. In NS, they're termed the Frontiersmen and the Kharaa, respectively. What sets it apart from some similar but less impressive clones is the overall quality of the package and the completely different playing styles between the two opposing forces.

As you might have guessed, this is a multiplayer-only mod. As the marines, players will rely heavily on teamwork and strategy as they do not have the firepower to take on the aliens one-on-one. Unlike many other mods, there isn't a selection of classes to choose from, the one exception being the Commander, who is used to direct team mates and manage weapon/resource research and distribution. The time setting is

only near future so rather than an arsenal of outlandish weapons, the armoury is well-stocked and workmanlike rather than flashy.

On the other side, the Kharaa are divided into five unique and varied classes. The aliens are more suited to players who like gung-ho action as they possess devastating killing power and lightning-fast reflexes. The Kharaa do not have an overall Commander to control resources; instead, players have the option to evolve into a defensive worker class to generate and secure resources. Not only can the Kharaa evolve into different species, they can upgrade a range of abilities as well. While they are the more interesting force to play, the sides are evenly matched.

The mod team have done wonders with the Half-Life engine and prove that there's still life in it yet. Everything looks graphically superb in NS, but the real

standouts are the particle effects and character models. The downside is that NS must run in OpenGL, which instantly makes it less accessible for some more casual mod gamers. The sound is equally dark and atmospheric and the taunts for both teams just adds to the feeling of hostility.

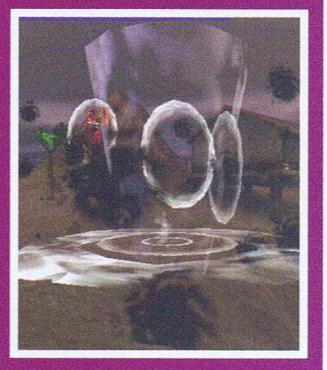
Forget the cliched storyline, this is a mod that's all about solid and varied gameplay. The fact that the graphics and audio are so good, and the whole mod presented in a professional package, is just a bonus. The only sour note is that because the first full public version has only recently been released there are a couple of minor kinks (mainly clipping and cosmetic improvements) to still iron out. Expect a patch soon and then get set for some excellent multiplayer action where everyone will be able to hear you scream.



DARK MAGIC

■ URL: planetunreal.com/ucz/
For: UT ■ Rating: 4/5

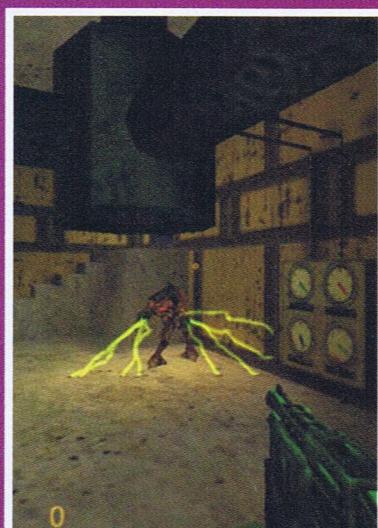
While the usual game mode suspects are all here, albeit in renamed "magical form" what sets this mod apart is a deep and inventive spell system. Players have six elemental types of magic to chose from as well as a number of different schools, making for plenty of variety and replay value. The effects of some of the more powerful spells will give players plenty of incentive to ascend from lowly mage to master wizard. This is an extremely fun mod that shows that gameplay will always trump a good story.



MISSION FAILED

For: Half-Life ■ URL: neodelight.com/missionfailed ■ Rating: 3/5

Think you're king of all things Half-Life, singleplayer style? Then check out this prequel mod which transports players back to the Black Mesa facility, on the hunt for the G-Man. While the outcome of the storyline is predictable (see the title) the 14 maps offer plenty of variety and feature a mix of well-crafted puzzles. Lack of multiplayer and any custom models hurts, as do some hideous clipping and collision detection bugs, but overall this is a good quality single player episode that offers equal parts fun and challenge.



QUAKE 3 Urban Terror MOD LIFE

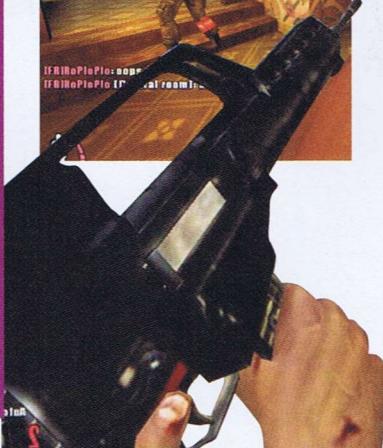
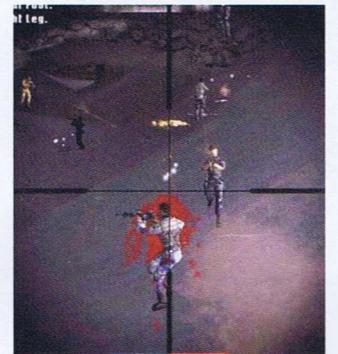
For: Quake 3 Arena ■ Version: Beta 2.6 ■ Size: 238 MB ■ URL: www.urbanterror.net ■ Rating: 5/5



D-DAY: NORMANDY

For: Quake 2 ■ URL: dynamic.gamespy.com/~dday/site/ ■ Rating: 4/5

Although this class-based teamplay-oriented TC has been out for quite a while, it's a good time to revisit it for two reasons. Firstly, the latest version (4.0) fixes plenty of annoying bugs, updates all the invasion maps, and sports a revamped HUD and enhanced explosion effects. The second, better reason is that it now comes as a complete stand-alone file, meaning that if you've long since wiped Quake 2 from your hard drive, you can still enjoy this excellent WW2 mod and get mates hooked on some solid multiplayer action.



Quite a few mods have been touted as Counter-Strike killers but few have lived up to the hype. In a year in which some huge mods have been released, comes this latest professional quality offering which the mod team is determined to distinguish from the many CS copies.

While Urban Terror is a 'realistic' mod, the overall gameplay, while pushing the cooperative play angle, is faster. Paying homage to Action Quake 2, the mod team has been conscious of incorporating tactical elements while maintaining the faster action Quake players prefer.

The current release features the typical multiplayer team-based play modes such as Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and CTF. Objective-based missions have been promised for future releases. As you might expect, Urban Terror again focuses on the terrorist versus elite counter-terrorist scenario.

Rest assured though that there is a diverse arsenal of hardware to choose from with the latest release introducing the Kalashnikov AK-103, with the P90, Remington m870, and the Para-Ordnance 1640 all promised in the future. Apart from weaponry and various attachments, there is an assortment of items to stock up on via the nifty loadout. The HUD and overall interface and menus are equally slick.

Some new features in the form of environmental damage and breakable

DEFENCE ALLIANCE

For: UT/UT2003 ■ URL: www.planetunreal.com ■ Rating: 4/5

Like many others running under the UT engine, this mod is migrating over to UT2003. That's not to say this team-based mod isn't worth checking out. The premise is simple: grab some friends and defend your base against a horde of marauding bots. Although there is no reverse option to put the bots on the defensive, this will be included in the UT2003 version. In the meantime, the well designed maps and fast, frenetic action still make this worth a look. A mod for players who enjoy the siege-type mentality.



objects add more to the overall experience rather than drastically affecting gameplay. However the new ledge jumping/grabbing adds another dimension by really opening up freedom of movement. Location specific damage also adds to the realism factor.

Although the models are all excellent, it's the varied and skilfully designed maps where Urban Terror really stands out from the competition. There isn't really a weak map among the 14 on offer, although players will of course have their favourites. The mod team has drawn inspiration from a huge number of sources, as shown by the desert-themed map based on the movie Three Kings and a bombed WW2 town from the final scene in Saving Private Ryan. These are combined with some more "standard settings" such as a shopping mall, underwater military facility, and an underground mine. As they should, the different maps have a huge impact on playing styles and the approach teams will take.

While the terrorism theme has been done to death, players are inclined to be more forgiving when they've done this well. While it has a similar feel, Urban Terror is a different game to CS and players can hardly complain when given they're given choices.



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TECH IN REVIEW

ASHER AND JERE AND \$250,000 WORTH OF SWEET, SWEET KIT



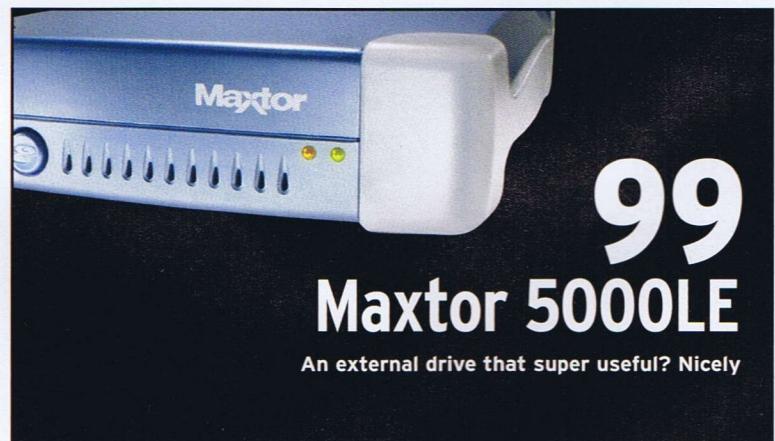
C Although by the time you read this the last-minute Christmas rush will be well and truly over, there is still plenty of hardware out there that is more than worthy of your hard-earned dollars, and this issue of PCPP Tech certainly highlights this fact.

CD writers have come a long way since their inception, so much so that they are now featured in nearly every PC sold, whether it is purchased from an OEM, Dick Smith or even (shudder) over the Internet. CD-RW drives make everyday computing life infinitely easier, in the sense that you are now able to make quick and easy backups of important software and files without having to resort to the hell that is multiple floppy disks or expensive tape drives and portable hard disks. Furthermore, rapid advancements in CD-RW technology mean that it is now possible to create full 700MB CDs in a matter of minutes, and the integration of CD writing software into operating systems such as WindowsXP makes doing so significantly easier.

However, with so many brands of CD-RW drive currently on the market, it can be increasingly difficult to make a decision as to which provides the highest performance or best value for money. Thus, this months tech feature sets out to determine just that, and boy were the results interesting. We've got 40x drives performing just seconds slower than their 52x counter-parts, as well as lower rated drives outperforming some of the higher rated ones! Very strange indeed. If you are likely to be in the market for a new CD writer in the near future, make sure you check this one out.

As well as this, in light of new information released just after PCPP#81's DirectX 9.0 feature went to print (damnit), we have also written up a full technology overview of nVIDIA's latest graphics chipset, the GeForceFX previously codenamed NV30. The GeForceFX certainly looks to be the next big thing in graphics hardware, and we are anxiously awaiting the day we get to benchmark it against the R9700 when working hardware finally hits the shelves sometime in February 2003.

As far as reviews are concerned, we've also tested the Intel E7205-based Asus P4G8X, Maxtor's 5000LE external hard drive, Thermaltake's new Hardcano 8 VR and Spark 7 products, Zalman's CNPS6500-Cu heatsink/fan unit, the Thrustmaster 360 Modena gamepad and finally, an Abit NF7-S nForce2 motherboard - Dig in!



Asher Moses
Technical Writer
letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



CD RW ROUNDUP



It didn't really happen overnight, but it did happen. It seems that most of us were either too busy, or not paying attention closely enough to realise that over the last 2 years the final remaining retro item of the PC, the Floppy Drive is just about finally obsolete. The reason for this? CD Burners of course.

Able to hold 600 times the information of a 3.5" disk and with the recent 48+ speed drives capable also of writing faster than a floppy were assured that the CD burner has a place firmly cemented in our PCs. It's currently the ultimate storage device and although many of you already have a burner our

recent survey established it was the one piece of hardware that was most desired at the next upgrade. To assist you in this purchase, **Jere Lawrence** and **Asher Moses** heat up the lab as they go ahead and comprehensively test six internal and four external CD burners.

ASUS CRW-5224A 52X/24X/52X (CAV) INTERNAL



LG GCE-8481B 48X24X48 (CAV) INTERNAL



There's nothing particularly stunning visually about this drive as the face layout is completely standard but in regard to performance it's currently king. The drive features a 2MB buffer and underrun protection called Flextralink.

Performance

This drive performed admirably and is currently the fastest drive we tested, but only by a margin over the Lacie external. The burn operation started at 24x and rose steadily thereafter. When 20% of the drives burn operation had been performed rotation rate was at a respectable 32x. At 50% of the operation the drive was moving at 41x and by 75% of the operation was burning at 48x, double the original starting speed. The rest of the burn operation worked perfectly and completed at 52.95, a little faster than the drives rating. The overall average burn speed was 40.10 and the entire operation completed in only 2'33". DAE extraction was good but not on par with the write operations. It took only 1'43" to extract the entire test CD and averaged an overall read speed of 33.3x.

Extras

The drive comes with a non ATA100 compliant IDE ribbon cable, Nero 5.5, instructions, 1 blank 52x CD, 1 blank 24x re-writable CD and an amusing emergency eject pin to replace the tried but true paper clip.

The fastest drive we tested. Reliable, sturdy and excellent data rate which makes for an extremely good product.

Price: \$150
Distributor: Achieva
URL: www.achieva.com.au
Phone: 02 9742 3288

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LITEON LTR-48125W 48X/12X/48X (P-CAV) INTERNAL



LG, the home appliance people, like Sony and Samsung before it are now also manufacturing optical drives of which their 48 speed offering is extremely good. It features the expected 2MB buffer along with buffer underrun protection and has no glaring aesthetic faults.

Performance

For a 48 speed drive the LG did extremely well and even surpassed itself. Initial burn speed started off at 22x and reached 32x speed within the first 25% of the burn. Its acceleration remained consistent and at 50% of the operation had managed to achieve a 38x rate. By 75% the drive had reached 44x and at the conclusion of the burn process had achieved a write speed of 49.1x, 155KB per second faster than its rating. The overall average speed was 37.19x and the entire operation took 2'38" which is only 5 seconds slower than a 52x drive and makes for a very respectable result. Curiously, DAE performance was not a strong point of this drive taking 2'11" to extract an entire CD and averaged an overall read speed of 26.3x. So, although the LG can burn a CD faster than the 48x Liteon it extracts digital audio slower.

Extras

This drive comes with a copy of Nero 5.5.9.9, InCD 3.34.0, a non ATA100 IDE ribbon cable, four screws and an analogue CD to soundcard audio cable. The documentation for this unit is refreshingly professional with instructions for Nero, the drive and a written warranty.

Only 5 seconds slower than a 52x offering this drive is a more than adequate alternative to the Asus 52x but only 5 seconds slower may even be a worthy replacement to the 52

A highly regarded maker of optical devices Liteon have made a big name for themselves in a very short time, so much so that Sony re-badges Liteon devices to sell as their own product. This drive utilises a 2MB buffer and "Smart Burn" technology that alleviates buffer underruns and slow media problems.

Performance

This aspect of the drive was disappointing because it never reached its full potential. The burn started well at 18x but by the first 25% of the operation was only writing at 27x and by 50% was only writing at 32x which is not good at all. The last stage of the burn performed even worse and by 75% write speed was 38x until it reached a maximum speed of 40x at the 90% stage which it maintained until the end of the burn. Clearly this drive did not reach its potential of 48x and only managed an average speed of 31.60x and took 3'04" to complete the operation. On the other hand DAE performance was excellent and the drive was able to extract a whole CD in 1'55" with an average read speed of 29.9x.

Extras

Included with the drive is a copy of Nero 5.5.8.3, four screws, one 4 pin audio cable, one 12x blank CD-RW, a 48x blank CDR and a non ATA100/133 compatible IDE ribbon cable.

A 48x drive that doesn't actually reach 48x but instead caps at 40x, great price though

Price: \$149
Distributor: LG Electronics
URL: www.lg.com.au
Phone: 02 9684 8000

93

Price: \$99
Distributor: Compuparts
URL: www.compuparts.com.au
Phone: 02 9482 2582

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MITSUBISHI DIAMOND DATA DD481648 48X/16X/48X (CAV) INTERNAL



Another generic looking drive the DD481648 does have a couple of extra niceties mainly an additional play/skip button for easy playing of CDs without need of a player and an extra LED that lights up when a disk is inserted. The drive features a 2MB buffer and buffer underrun protection referred to as "BurnProtection".

Performance

A CAV drive the Diamond unit performed extremely well and started its burn process at a very healthy 22x. By the first 25% of the burn operation the drive was performing at 32x and by 50% of the operation had achieved a burn rate of 39x. With a steady and stable increase in data rate by the 75% mark the drive was performing at 44x and accelerated past the mark and completed the operation at 49x, 150K per second faster than it was rated and achieved an overall average of 37.16x taking 2'37" to complete the operation. DAE performance was excellent and completely ripped our audio CD in 1'52" with an average speed of 30.8x.

Extras

Included in the packaging is one non ATA100 compliant IDE ribbon cable, 3.5" DOS driver disk, one blank 48x CD, one (non rated) blank CD-RW, one copy of Nero V5.5.8.2, four screws, one 4-pin analogue CD to soundcard cable, an instruction manual and a 1 year warranty.

Only 4 seconds slower than the Asus 52x and 1 second faster than LG. A touch more expensive than the Asus product but otherwise a comparable product despite only being 48x

Price: \$175

Distributor: Mitsubishi

URL: www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au

Phone: 02 9684 7777

95

PANASONIC CD-R/RW UJDD420-KIT 40X/12X/48X (Z-CLV) INTERNAL



For those that aren't in the know, Panasonic drives come under the branding of Matsushita who have been making optical drives since the days of single speed units. The drive utilises a 2MB buffer and buffer underrun protection which they've decided to call "JustLink Write Safe Technology".

Performance

The UJDD420 is a zone based drive with four zones as opposed to Samsung's five. The first zone consisted of 6 tracks (7.5%) and started at a respectable 20x. Zone 2 was 20 tracks long (25%) but at 24x represented only a minor increase in speed. Zone 3 is 23 tracks long (29.23%) and ran at 32x. The 4th and final zone was 29 tracks long (37.59%) and ran flawlessly at its maximum speed of 40x. Once again the last and fastest track ran for the longest time which makes for a more efficient writing process. In all it took 3'11" to burn the CD and averaged an overall data rate of 31.49x. DAE was extremely good and this drive managed to extract an entire audio CD in exactly 2 minutes with an average speed of 37.6x.

Extras

The UJDD420 is one of the more sparse kits received and included one blank 10x CD-RW, a blank 24x CD-R and a copy of Nero express and Nero vision, one non ATA100 IDE ribbon cable, four screws and a manual.

This isn't the fastest driver we reviewed, nor is it cheapest. Although testing showed the drive to be thoroughly capable you're better off getting the cheaper 52x or 48x unit

Price: \$189

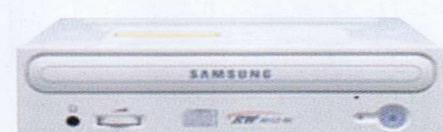
Distributor: Panasonic

URL: www.panasonic.com.au

Phone: 132 600

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SAMSUNG SW-240 40X/12X/40X (Z-CLV) INTERNAL



The SW-240 features an 8MB buffer and support for packet writing and buffer underrun which are all the usual niceties you would expect from a modern CD Burner. The front panel is unique in style and relatively attractive with the rounded corners of the CD tray and round eject button giving it softer edges which some might really appreciate.

Performance

In regard to performance, this is a Z-CLV drive which means that it has a series of zones where it runs at different speeds and in the case of the SW-240, it used 5 zones. The first zone ran at 16x speed for the first 2 tracks (2.5%) of the operation then throttled up to 20x for the next 8 tracks (10%). From tracks 10 - 30 (24%) the drive spun up to 24x speed but it wasn't until tracks 30-54 (29%) that the drive started to perform at the more reasonable speed of 32x. The final 28 tracks (34%) are recorded at 40x which remained stable but more importantly signified that the longest burn operation is done at maximum speed and overall the entire burn operation took 3'23" and averaged an overall speed of 30.27x. CDDAE (CD Digital Audio Extraction) performed well and ripped a full audio CD in 0'21" managing an average extraction speed of 25x.

Extras

The SW-240 comes with a copy of Nero 5.5, 1 blank 40x CD-R CD, 1 blank 10 speed CD-RW CD, user manual, CD audio cable for sound cards and an old IDE cable that isn't compatible with ATA100-133 IDE controllers but suitable for older more standard systems.

Averaged a highly respectable overall speed of 30.27 and maintained a steady rate with each zone. Good price too

Price: \$95

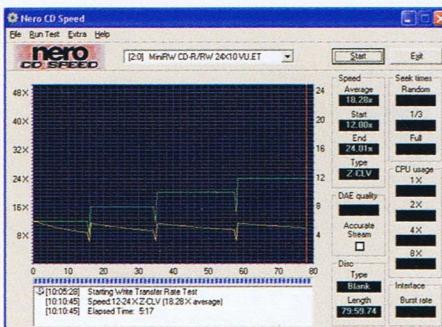
Distributor: Altech

URL: www.altech.com.au

Phone: 02 9735 5655

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BENQ PORTABLE CRW2410MR 24X/10X/32X (Z-CLV) EXTERNAL



The Benq portable unit is one of the nicer external units available. Although a little bulky, the unit has a pleasant silvery finish, is light (only 520g) and even has a headphone jack and volume control on the side to emphasise its portable nature. The internal buffer is 2MB and this time buffer underrun protection is referred to as "Seamless Link".

Performance

The Benq drive isn't particularly fast having a maximum write speed of only 24x but still did quite well. This drive used four zones and began the burn operation at 12x for track 1 - 16 (20%). Zone 2 increased the write speed to 16x which it burned constantly at from tracks 15 - 35 (23%). Zone 3 brought the write speed up to 20x and was extremely stable writing tracks 35 - 58 (28%). Zone 4, the final stage brought the speed up to 24x where it burnt the final 22 tracks (27%) which was slightly less than the 20x burn stage. The entire operation finished in 5'17" and achieved an overall burn rate of 18.28. As this was a portable drive, DAE extraction benching was not possible but Windows Media player managed to extract our test CD in 3'52"

Extras

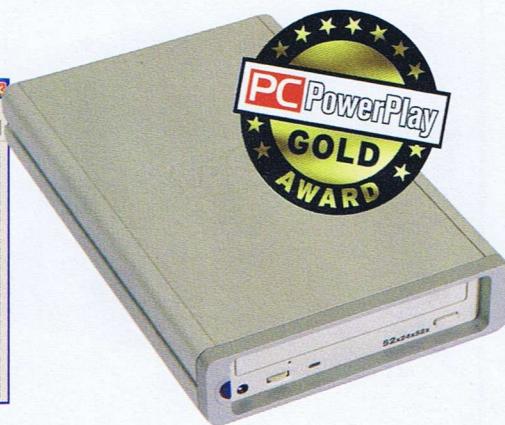
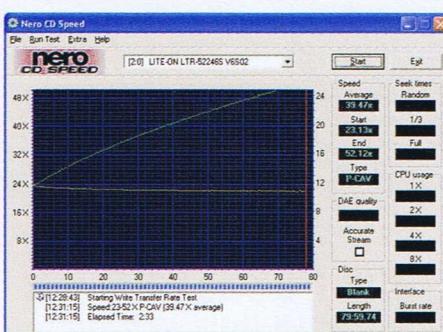
The drive comes with a power supply, USB to drive specific plug cable, Nero 5.5 and instructions.

The slowest of the portable external units but still worked effectively as well as being aesthetically pleasing but for the same price you can get a 52x external LaCie

Price: \$399
Distributor: Benq
URL: www.benq.com.au
Phone: 02 9714 6800

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LACIE EXTERNAL CD-RW 52X/24X/52X (CAV) EXTERNAL



LaCie's external unit was actually one of our best performers so top marks to them, or more accurately Lite-On. This is because inside the LaCie external unit is a 52x speed Lite-On CD-RW that unlike its 48 speed sibling actually managed to hit top speed. It features a 2MB Buffer along with underrun protection and is encased in an attractive aluminium frame with a pleasantly blue activity LED. There are two models, either Firewire or USB 2.0 and the unit tested was the Firewire version of the drive which installed effortlessly.

Performance

The LaCie drive performed admirably. The burn operation started at a respectable 24x and by the time it was 25% complete was surpassing 33x. At 50% of the operation the drive had reached 40x speeds and by 75% completion had passed 48x. For the last quarter of the burn the drive continued to increase in speed until it reached its maximum of 52x at the 95% mark. A thoroughly capable drive, the LaCie external completed its test burn in 2'33" and managed an overall average speed of 39.47x. Unfortunately, the CDDAE software only works on IDE devices so were unable to test DAE speed but Windows Media Player managed to extract our test audio CD in 2'17".

Extras

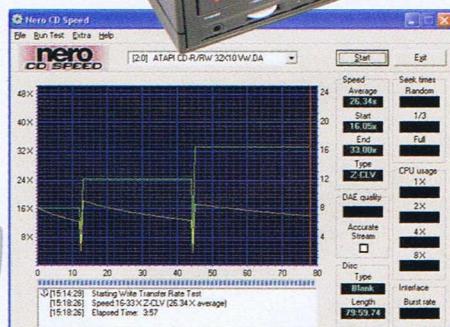
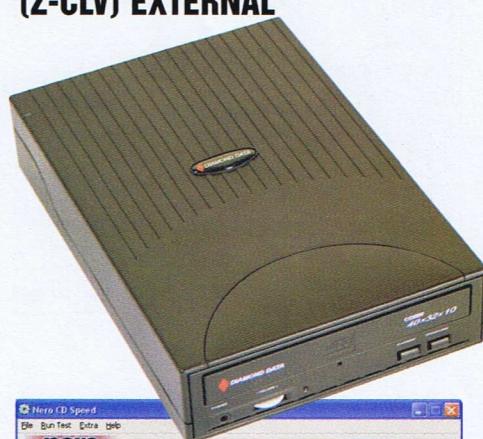
Included in the package is the external drive, power supply, firewire or USB cable, Easy CD Creator Basic 5.3.2, Direct CD 5.3.2, USB 2.0 drivers and a 48x blank CD-R.

Extremely fast and stable performance, plus it's portable. Perfect for backing up numerous systems

Price: \$399
Distributor: LaCie
URL: www.lacie.com.au
Phone: 02 9669 6900

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MITSUBISHI DIAMOND DATA DD321040-158 32X/10X/40X (Z-CLV) EXTERNAL



This particular Diamond offering is an external unit that is fully USB 2.0 compatible but will still work on a USB 1.1 interface. The unit is completely black which is probably meant to match the common black of laptops (the most likely target audience for a portable CD-RW) but also happens to be aesthetically pleasing but a little bulky. This drive features a 2MB buffer and the same "BurnProtection" as the DD481648.

Performance

Although this is a Z-CLV drive, being a slower speed it only featured 3 zones. The first zone started at a speed of 16x and continued for 11 tracks (14%). Zone 2 was quite large and wrote tracks 11-44 at 24x which constituted 41% of the entire CD. The final zone continued from tracks 44-80 (45%) and which remained stable at 33x and represented a burn length only 4% longer than the 24x speed operation. Still it's worth noting that almost half the CD is written at maximum velocity which in this case was 1x higher than the advertised rating and overall the drive averaged a data rate of 26.34x. Unfortunately our CDDAE software was incompatible with non IDE devices but using Media Player the test audio was fully extracted in 3'47".

Extras

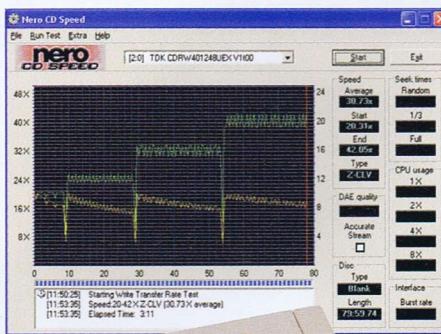
Shipping with this drive is one power supply, a 2 meter USB cable, 2 feet so the drive can sit on its side, 3.5" DOS drivers disk, Nero V5.5.8.2, InCD 32.8.1, a blank unrated CD-RW, a blank 40x CD-R, documentation and a 1 year warranty.

The second fastest of the external units this Mitsubishi drive performed quite well but was still 33 seconds slower than the LaCie 52 speed drive

Price: \$389
Distributor: Mitsubishi
URL: www.mitsubishi-electric.com.au
Phone: 02 9684 7777

88

TDK VELOC'D UE-401248 40X/12X/48X (Z-CLV) EXTERNAL



An external drive the veloCD is a little smaller than the external Lacie offering but obviously, nowhere near as fast. The front panel is standard except for the deep blue CD tray which is rather pleasant. 2MB more than almost everyone else the veloCD has a 4MB buffer and the ubiquitous buffer underrun protection sans any buzz words. The drive is best used on a USB 2.0 interface as under USB1.1 it throttles down to 4x.

Performance

In regard to performance, this drive was good but also a little strange. The "constant" in constant linear velocity seemed to be absent as this drive wrote the most erratically of all our tested Z-CLV units. It did however complete the operation without any problems so it's not a concern. The first zone consisted of tracks 0-10 (12.5%) and started at 20x but would peak at 21x. The next zone went from tracks 10 - 30 (25%) and averaged 24x peaking at 25.1x. Zone 3 consisted of tracks 30 - 54 (30%) and averaged 32x with a peak of about 34x. The final burn went from tracks 54-80 (32.5%) and constituted the longest zone at the fastest speed reaching 40x and even surpassing it peaking at 43x which is exceptional at 450kps faster than the drive is rated. The overall burn operation averaged 30.73 and it took 3'11" to complete the test. DAE extraction was done using Media Player and the drive managed to extract the test CD rather slowly taking 4'37" to complete.

Extras

The drive comes with Nero 5.5, InCD 2 and TDK Digital MixMaster, 1 12x blank CDRW, 1 40x blank CDR, USB 2.0 to proprietary veloCD plug and a pen for writing on CDs with.

The second fastest of the external units this Mitsubishi drive performed quite well but was still 33 seconds slower than the Lacie 52 speed drive at the same price

Price: \$399
Distributor: TDK
URL: www.tdk.com.au
Phone: 02 9684 7777

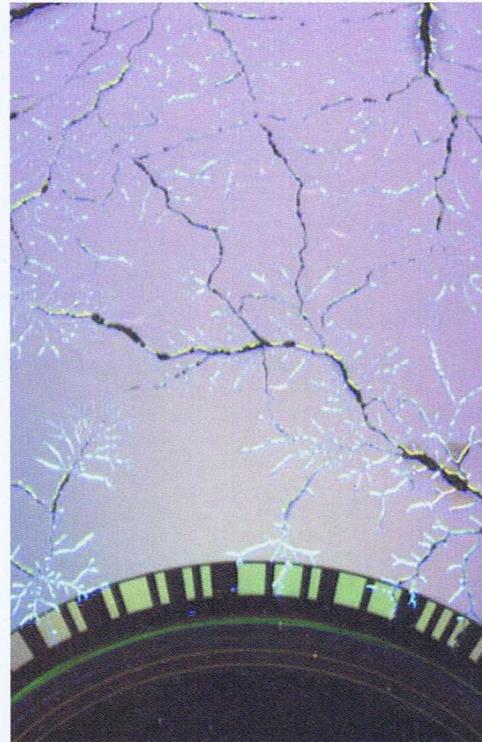
85

Drive	Av Speed	Burn Time	Ext Speed	Ext Time	Drive type
CRW-5224A	40.10	2'33"	33.3	1'43"	CAV
LG GCE-8481B	37.19	2'38"	26.3	2'11"	CAV
Mitsubishi IN	37.16	2'37"	30.8	1'52"	CAV
Liteon	31.60	3'04"	29.9	1'55"	P-CAV
Panasonic	31.49	3'11"	28.7	2'00"	Z-CLV
Samsung	30.27	3'23"	25.3	2'16"	Z-CLV

LACIE POCKET CD-RW 24X/10X/24X (UNKNOWN)



Although this drive looked great in its swish rubber coated external casing that's about the only praise that can be given to this drive as we could not get it to work on two entirely different systems. We first tried it on the Intel system that we tested every other drive on (including external drives) but although the drive was recognised, it could not write, nor even read a standard blank CD. Next we tested it on an AMD Athlon XP2100 and experienced the same results. No matter what system we tried it on, the drive wouldn't recognise blank CD's. We even had a replacement unit shipped in case the first one was faulty but the new unit also exhibited the same problem. Further discussion with LaCie allowed us to discover that they were using a PCI based NEC USB 2.0 controller which according to them does work. Whatever you do, if interested in buying this drive, make sure it works on your PC first or buy an NEC USB 2.0 PCI card.



Different writing methodologies

There are a number of different ways that CD writers burn their information onto a CD and each method has its advantages. The better the methodology though the more expensive the unit will be but it can be worth it as a 20x P-CAV drive is faster than a 24x Z-CLV. Following is a definition of the terms:

CLV: Constant Linear Velocity

The disk is written at a constant speed and maximum performance for these types of drives is currently 14x.

CAV: Constant Angular Velocity

With this methodology, the disk is written at a constant marginally increasing speed until it reaches its maximum speed which coincides with the end of the disk.

P-CAV: Partial-Constant Angular Velocity

The disk is written to at an increasing speed until it reaches its maximum and from then on the transfer rate remains constant. P-CAV drives are faster than CAV drives because they reach their maximum speed much earlier.

Z-CLV: Zone-Constant Linear Velocity

Z-CLV is only used in the writing process and the way it works is that the drive is divided into a series of zones. After each zone, the write speed is increased until the last zone is burned at maximum speed.

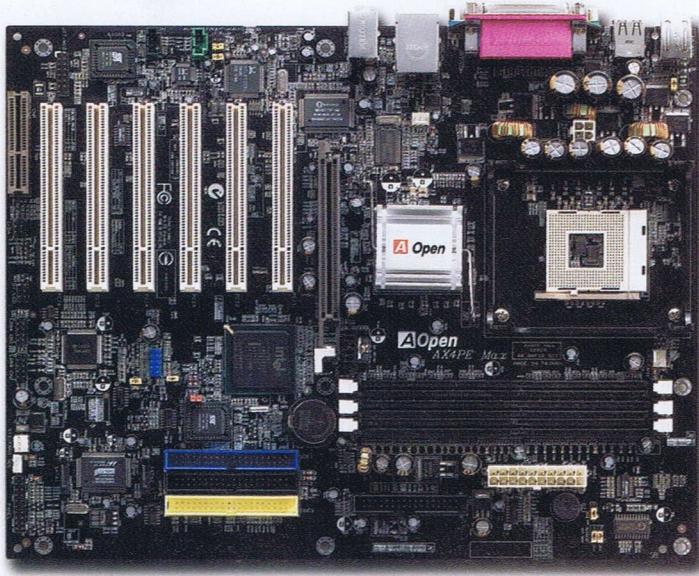
Drive	Av Speed	Burn Time	MP Ext Speed	Drive type
LaCie 52/24/52	39.47	2'38"	2'17"	CAV
Mitsubishi External	37.19	2'38"	26.3	Z-CLV
TDK UE-401248	37.16	2'37"	30.8	Z-CLV
Benq CRW2410MR	31.60	3'04"	29.9	Z-CLV



P4 Motherboard In Black

MVB

**Serial ATA vs EzRestore
Rapid & Recoverable**



AX4PE Max

*Recommend by IT web site professional by Anand Tech
<http://www.anandtech.com>



support Serial ATA interface, develop
the best performance of motherboard.

	Parallel ATA	Serial ATA
Bandwidth	100/133 MB/Secs	150 MB/Secs *
Volts	5V	250mV
Pins	40 pin	7 pin
Length Limitation	45.72公分	100公分
Ventilation	No	Yes
Peer-to-Peer	No	Yes



EzRestore

Instant Restoration System

The kernel in BIOS can provide best compatibility to motherboard, and the Pre-Os can protect any virus or accident OS crash after BIOS boot. Basically, only a mere 100MB is enough for hard disk of any size. (please visit AOpen website to get more information.
<http://english.aopen.com.tw/tech/techinside/EzRestore.htm>)

AK77-8X Max

- support 266/333MHz FSB AMD CPU
- DDR333, USB2.0
- serial ATA, ATA133
- IEEE 1394
- 8X AGP Slot
- S/PDIF support
- Lan / Audio onboard

MX46-U2



- support 400MHz P4 CPU
- SiS650GX+962L
- support DDR200/266
- VGA integrated, Audio (5.1 channel) onboard

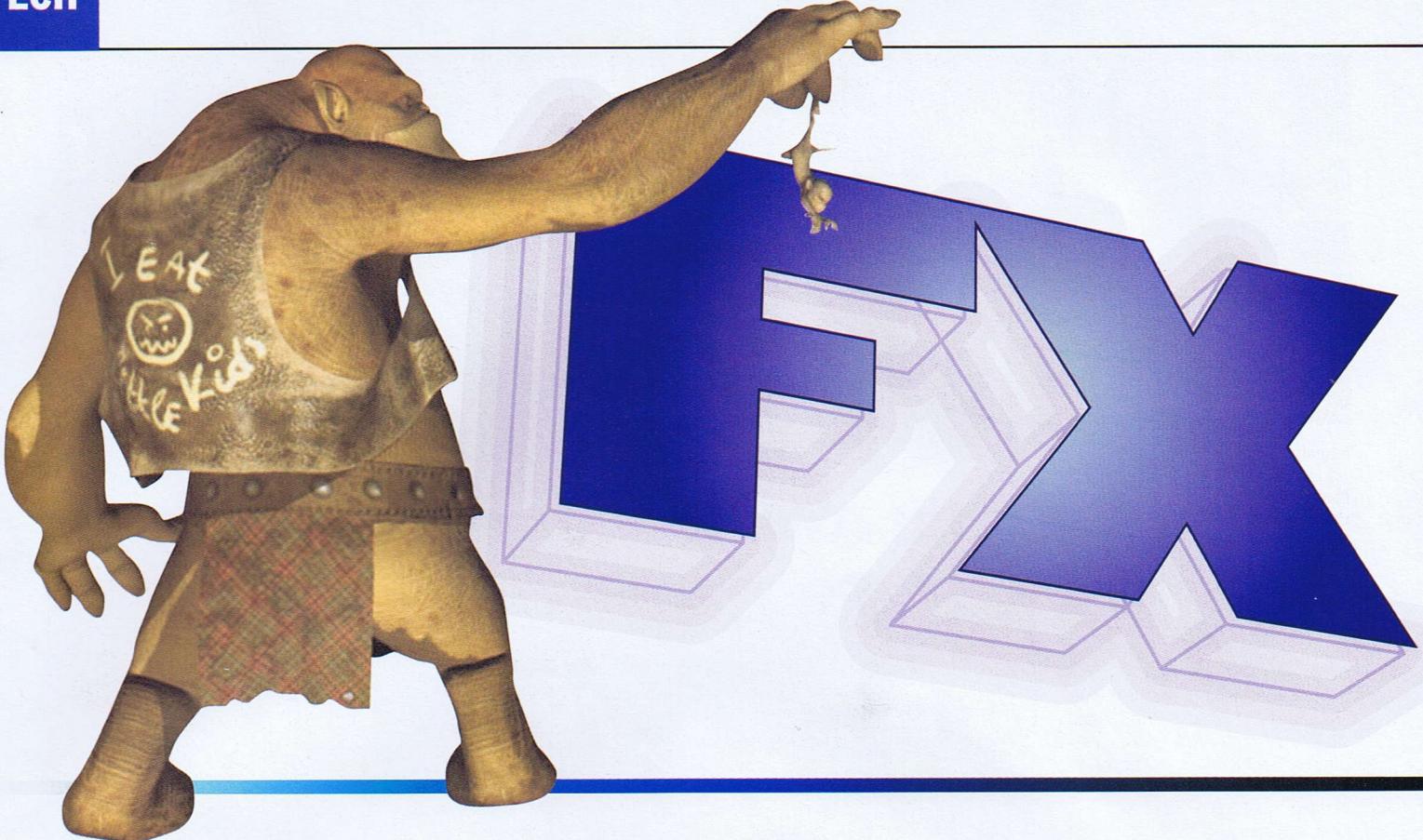
Manufacture by :

bluechip
infotech

Phone : 02 8745 8400
Fax : 02 8745 8499
marketing@bluechipit.com.au
www.bluechipit.com.au

AOpen

Solutions • Components
www.aopen.com.tw
Tel:886-2-3789 5888
meitseng@aopen.com.tw



nVIDIA has completed its next-generation video chip, and while we wait for board manufacturers to actually mount the GeForceFX on something, *Asher Moses* takes us through what we can expect from this remarkable piece of technology

Considering the fact that, with the Radeon 9700, ATI has successfully managed to knock nVIDIA off its perch as the manufacturer of the highest performing consumer-level graphics chipset, it's unsurprising that nVIDIA's latest product, the GeForceFX (previously codenamed NV30) has been promptly announced, months before we will even see it ready for store shelves. Although it's always nice to get a sneak peak at what lies ahead, nVIDIA has most likely done this to avoid Christmas buyers straying from the nVIDIA path - a shrewd if somewhat potentially unethical business strategy.

As a number of PCPP forum members can attest, over the past few months the web has been abounding with rumours and discussions regarding the possible specifications of the GeForceFX, which has unsurprisingly led to much confusion as well as hype.

Issue #81 featured an article on DirectX 9.0 which discussed the API itself, as well as graphics chipsets based around it including both the NV30 and Radeon 9700. However, in light of new information that has been disclosed by nVIDIA since that particular article went to print, it became plainly necessary for us to keep you updated and thus, in usual PCPP fashion, we have prepared a full technical overview of the chipset so that you will have a vast knowledge on how it works when we are able to give you our complete performance review in the early months of 2003.

Cinema image quality?

If you read our Computex coverage back in PCPP#77, you may recall our interview with Derek Perez of nVIDIA where he mentioned that their next graphics chipset, the NV30, will feature true cinema-like image quality. Now that specifications regarding the chipset have been finalized, does this statement hold true? Well, it's hard to say without having a working card to test, however, judging from the various screenshots supplied by nVIDIA, it sure is close!

So what exactly gives us such a realistic image? Well, firstly, like the R9700, the GeForceFX features eight 128-bit pixel pipelines that are fully floating point enabled, which, as explained in PCPP#80's Radeon 9700 feature article allows for much higher colour precision, all the way up to a whopping 16 decimal places! This means that it is now possible to recreate objects down to the most minute detail, as the large amount of colour shades on offer allow for a much smoother, more defined image.

However, the pixel pipeline isn't the only area of a graphics chipset that determines image quality, as the vertex shader plays a large part in this as well. Since nVIDIA has built the GeForceFX around DirectX 9.0, much of the vertex shader engine had to be redesigned. Unlike the GeForce 4 which features dual parallel vertex shader units, the GeForceFX possesses a single vertex pipeline, featuring a parallel array of floating point processors. This allows the chipset to pump out a whopping 350 million triangles per second, 25 million more than that of the R9700. Being vertex shader 2.0+ compliant, the GeForceFX also supports conditional write masks, call & return, static flow control and

	DX8.0	R300	NV3x
Vertex Shaders	1.1	2.0	2.0+
Max Instructions	128	1024	65536
Max Static Instructions	128	256	256
Max. Constants	96	256	256
Temporary Registers	12	12	16
Max Loops	0	4	256
Conditional Write Masks	-	-	✓
Call & Return	-	-	✓
Static Flow Control	-	✓	✓
Dynamic Flow Control	-	-	✓

Here we see the advantages of nVIDIA's vertex 2.0+ specification

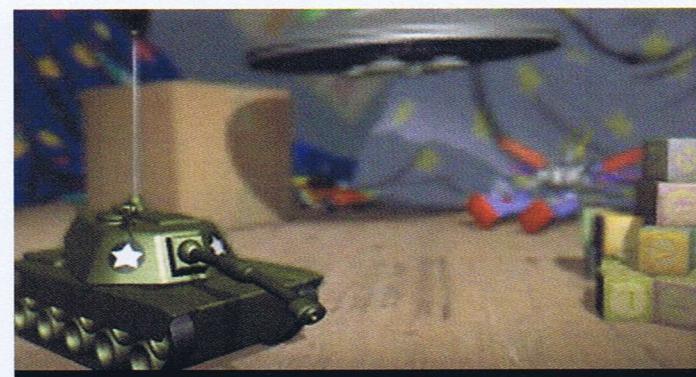
dynamic flow control, whereas the VS2.0 equipped R9700 only supports static flow control.

Not just a pretty face

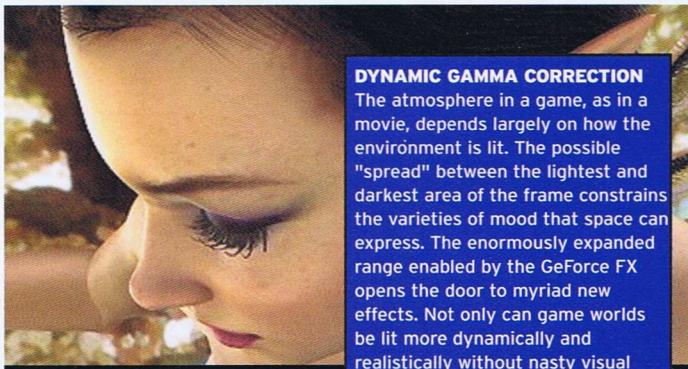
The first physical improvement made to the GeForceFX that hasn't been seen on graphics chipsets before it is the move to the 0.13-micron manufacturing process. Shrinking the die size from 0.15 to 0.13-micron not only means that the chipset will draw less power and thus, run cooler, but it also means that nVIDIA are able to reach much higher clock speeds, as highlighted

by the fact that the GeForceFX runs at a default core clock speed of a whopping 500MHz, 175MHz faster than the 0.15-micron Radeon 9700.

Although this die shrink does help to reduce the chipset's overall heat output, the fact that it includes a huge 125 million transistors quickly evens things out. In order to cool a chipset of this caliber, nVIDIA has been forced to develop a new copper cooling solution dubbed FlowFX. FlowFX is very similar in design to the cooler seen on the Abit OTES Ti4200 card reviewed in PCPP#81, in the sense that it utilizes



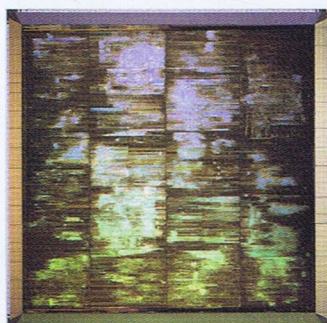
A screen from nVIDIA's toys demo - check out the depth effects!



How's this for realistic?

a heatpipe design that pushes warm air outside of the case using a double backplate bracket. Looking back on the evolution of PC cooling solutions, it seems very likely that water cooling will become mainstream in the not so distant future.

Just as regular DDR memory was becoming standard on most modern graphics cards, the GeForceFX raises the bar even further with its support for the new and improved DDR-II. While regular DDR is able to transfer data on both the rise and fall of the clock signal to give effectively double the total bandwidth of SDRAM, DDR-II doubles this yet again with its four-bit prefetch. Other advantages of DDR-II include a lower heat output due to the fact that its voltage requirements are a mere 1.8V (regular DDR requires 2.5V), as well as lower access times of 1.8ns



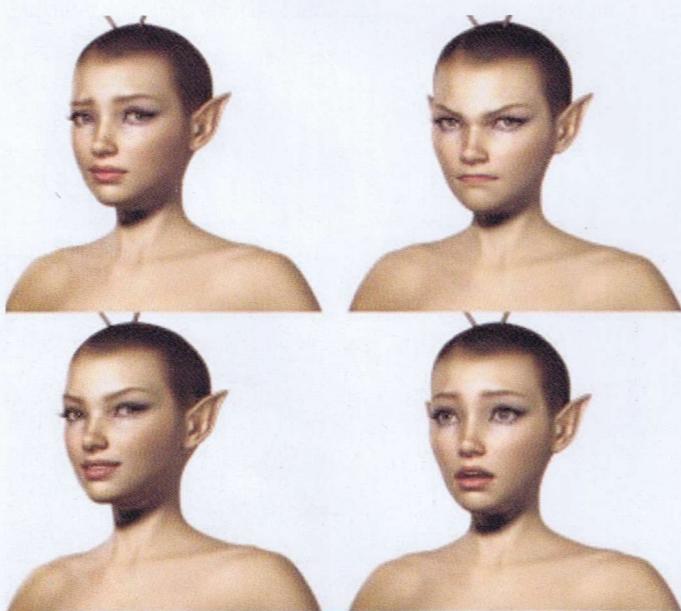
The core of the GeForce FX

DYNAMIC GAMMA CORRECTION

The atmosphere in a game, as in a movie, depends largely on how the environment is lit. The possible "spread" between the lightest and darkest area of the frame constrains the varieties of mood that space can express. The enormously expanded range enabled by the GeForce FX opens the door to myriad new effects. Not only can game worlds be lit more dynamically and realistically without nasty visual trade-offs, they can also reach new levels of immersion by simulating the human visual system's reaction to rapid light changes. The response curves of standard computer displays do not match the light sensing ability of the human eye, though, and something always seems to get lost in the translation, no matter how you twiddle the knobs. Ever played games that seem too dark in some areas, and washed out in others, with not much of an in-between? Unable to spot your enemies until too late, you boost your monitor's brightness, or tweak the game's esoteric video options, only to revisit them when the scene changes. The problem isn't with the game, it's with your hardware. The GeForce FX can much more accurately correct for differences between your eyes and monitor by supporting true dynamic gamma correction at the pixel level. This results in a more pleasant user experience as well as freeing developers from the burden of changing gamma spaces.

(regular DDR features a 2.9ns access time). Couple this with the fact that the memory on the GeForceFX will run at 500MHz (1GHz effectively) and you have the groundwork for quite a high performance graphics card indeed.

On the other hand, it was slightly disappointing to hear that the GeForceFX will only utilize a 128-bit bus, seeing as the Radeon



nVIDIA's reworked vertex shader allows for awesome face animations

PERFORMANCE GAINS

Due to the fact that working GeForceFX cards have not yet found their way into the hands of anyone outside nVIDIA, it's quite difficult to tell how big a performance advantage the GeForceFX will provide over its predecessors and the Radeon 9700. That said, nVIDIA are claiming a 30-50% increase in most benchmarks and have even released a Doom 3 performance graph that shows the GeForceFX next to both a Ti4600 and R9700. If this 40% performance increase holds true, there is definitely a lot to get excited about!



nVIDIA's time machine demo - watch the car age!

9700's memory bus is 256-bit. This significantly lowers available memory bandwidth and is why the GeForceFX's maximum transfer rate of 16GB/sec pales in comparison to the R9700's 19.6GB/sec memory bandwidth. Whether or not this has an impact on performance is left to be seen, however, it's certainly worth taking note of.

That said, as seen countless times in the past, increased performance doesn't only come from raw memory bandwidth, but how efficiently it is used as well. The GeForceFX utilizes an optimized version of nVIDIA's Lightspeed Memory Architecture II that includes the crossbar memory controller, a quad cache memory caching system, lossless z-buffer compression and fast z-clear technology, all of which come together in order to minimize the time taken for data to move in, out and around the memory controller. It will certainly be interesting to see if the high efficiency of nVIDIA's memory architecture is enough to make up for its lack of bandwidth.

Like all modern graphics chipsets, the GeForceFX features an AGP transfer rate of 8x, something that

looks to be an essential feature as games advance and more data has to be pumped down the AGP bus.

Conclusion

Although it's difficult to judge a product that is not yet in our hands, taking into account the GeForceFX's impressive specifications and advanced technology, it certainly doesn't look like ATI will continue their reign as king of the consumer-level graphics card market for long. Let's just hope that there are no more delays.

INTELLISAMPLE

One of the most interesting features seen on the GeForceFX is its colour compression engine, whose job is to sit between the memory controller and rendering pipeline and makes sure that all data coming out of the rendering pipeline is compressed before sending it to memory. Couple this with a lossless compression algorithm of 4:1 and, in theory, the GeForceFX is capable of transferring three times its original bandwidth ($[16 * 4] - 16 = 48\text{GB/sec}$). Where can this much memory bandwidth be used today? Well, because compression is completely loss-less, there is no reduction in image quality or loss of precision. The result of this is a dramatic increase in memory efficiency, ideal for areas such as anti-aliasing where multiple samples need to be taken per pixel. Speaking of anti-aliasing, the GeForceFX will feature two new AA modes, 8X under Direct3D and OpenGL and 6xS only under Direct3D. This advanced compression engine should mean that there will be a significantly reduced performance hit when AA is enabled, a very welcome change indeed.



I think I need a change of undies!

Asus P4G8X

■ Price: TBA ■ Distributor: Achieva ■ URL: www.achieva.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9742 3288

Issue #81's Tech feature discussed memory bandwidth and the current limitations seen on the AthlonXP's bottlenecked front side bus (FSB). In that same article there was also discussion on the superior bandwidth provided by the Pentium 4's FSB and how much of it is currently going unused.

Attempting to rectify this issue, Intel have recently launched their latest motherboard chipset, the E7205, previous codenamed "Granite Bay". The main feature Intel are touting with this chipset is dual-channel DDR 266 support. Effectively, this particular dual-channel controller takes two DDR266 memory modules, each providing 2.1GB/sec of memory bandwidth and combines them to give a total of 4.2GB/sec.

Coincidentally, this is the same level of bandwidth provided by the 533MHz FSB Pentium 4 processors and in theory should significantly increase performance. Other notable features provided by this chipset are AGP 8X, USB 2.0 and support for hyper-threading.

The first E7205-based motherboard to hit PCPowerPlay labs is the Asus P4G8X that, as we're used to seeing on Asus boards, comes packed with plenty of handy features as well as bundled goodies. Firstly, a Broadcom 5702 controller provides Gigabit Ethernet support, meaning it can support 10, 100 and 1000Mbps network connections. Single channel SerialATA is also supported through a Silicon Image 3112A controller as well as 2-channel ATA133 for those that are still holding off the inevitable upgrade to SerialATA.

Both IEEE1394 (firewire) and onboard audio are also available, which can now be considered as standard features for most modern motherboards. Unfortunately, though, Asus has decided to go with the Realtek ALC650 controller for the P4G8X, which doesn't produce as high quality sound as some of the other onboard audio controllers we've tested in the past such as the CMedia offering.

Another handy feature included on the P4G8X is a 4-pin auxillary connector that allows users who don't own an ATX12V power supply to still be able to adequately power their Pentium 4 processors. This is a very handy addition and we hope to see more motherboard manufacturers including this on future products.

The overall layout of the Asus P4G8X was relatively pleasing; however, there are a few notable issues that you should be aware of. Firstly, due to the fact that Asus have positioned the ATX power connector very close to the IDE and floppy headers, it can be quite difficult to modify your drive

configuration whilst your motherboard is installed inside the chassis. As well as this, the ATX12V connector is located too far away from the edge of the motherboard, meaning that the power wire has to run over the top of your heatsink fan unit, thus restricting airflow.

The board was tested using a P4B 2.4GHz chip running two 256MB Corsair XMS3200 memory modules as well as an Abit Ti4200 OTES graphics card. As you can see, compared to the single channel DDR333 supporting SiS648 chipset, the P4G8X performs quite nicely, with the added memory bandwidth provided by the dual-channel configuration giving a tangible performance boost. This is actually quite close to the performance boost we expected from bringing dual-channel memory to the Pentium 4, and after taking into account PCPP#82's nForce2 motherboard review, sets in stone the bandwidth limitations seen on the current generation of AMD Athlon processors.

Overall, we were very pleased with both the Asus P4G8X and the Intel E7205 chipset as a whole. Aside from a few very minor layout flaws, the board is near-perfect, with excellent performance, plenty of features and most importantly, high stability. The bottom line is, if you're in the market for a motherboard to go with your shiny new Pentium 4, you won't be disappointed with the Asus P4G8X.

Asher Moses

3DMark2001 SE - 1024x768 32-bit

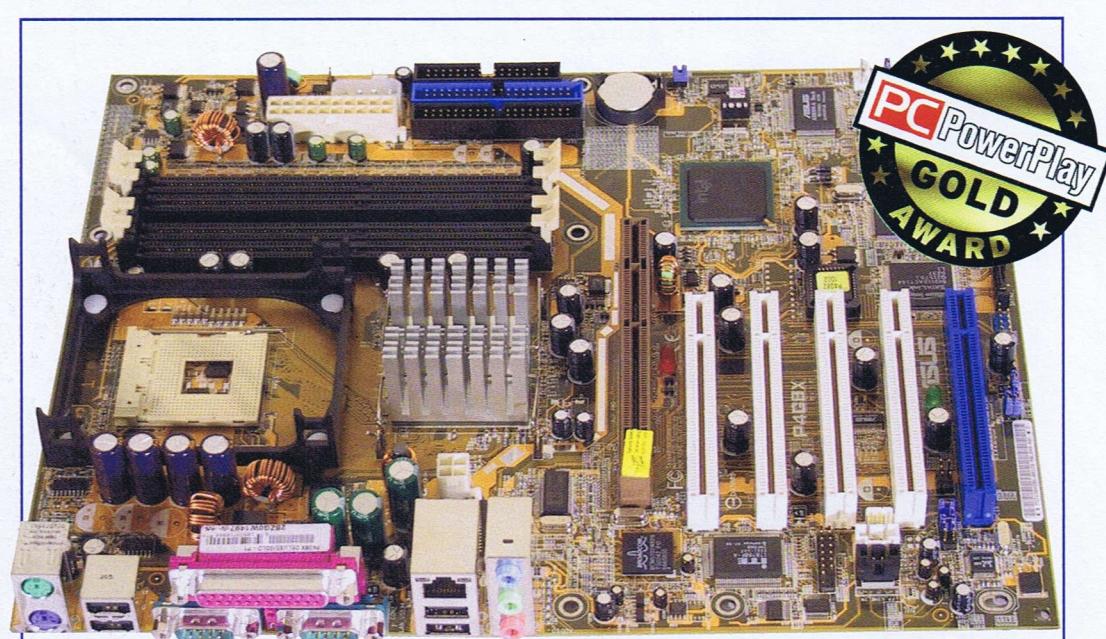
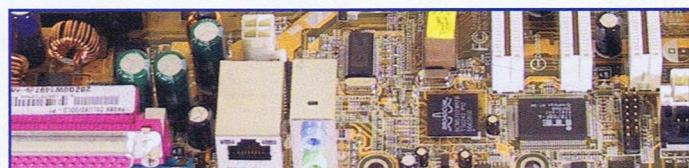
Asus P4G8X (E7205):	12023
Abit SR7-8X (SiS648):	10884
00000 1500 3000 4500 6000 7500 9000 10500 12000	

Unreal Tournament 2003 - 1024x768 32-bit

Flyby	
Asus P4G8X (E7205):	131.24
Abit SR7-8X (SiS648):	120.58
Botmatch	
Asus P4G8X (E7205): 50.2	
Abit SR7-8X (SiS648): 46.9	
000 15 30 45 60 75 90 105 120	

SiSoft Sandra Memory Benchmark

Asus P4G8X (E7205)	
RAM Int:	3252
RAM Float:	3251
Abit SR7-8X (SiS648)	
RAM Int:	2493
RAM Float:	2522
0000 400 800 1200 1600 2000 2400 2800 3200	



P4G8X

High performing,
feature rich and
stable. What more
could you ask for?

90

Abit NF7-S

■ Price: TBA ■ Distributor: Techbuy ■ URL: www.techbuy.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9648 1818

The Abit NF7-S, like the Asus A7N-8X reviewed last issue, looks promising. Firstly, the NF7-S comes packed with plenty of handy features including single-channel SerialATA support through the Silicon Image SIL3112A controller, 2-channel ATA133 support, six USB 2.0 ports, dual 10/100 LAN ports, five PCI slots, firewire support, AGP 8X and finally, six channel audio. This is certainly an impressive array of features and for those that don't own SerialATA drives but still want to use the SATA controller for IDE disks, Abit have even included two SATA-to-IDE converters (dubbed Serillex) that enable you to do just that!

As well as this, the quality of sound produced by nVidia's APU (Audio Processing Unit) is amazing for an onboard controller, and its support for real-time Dolby Digital decoding means that it can compete with the likes of competing PCI solutions including Creative's Soundblaster Live! and Audigy range.

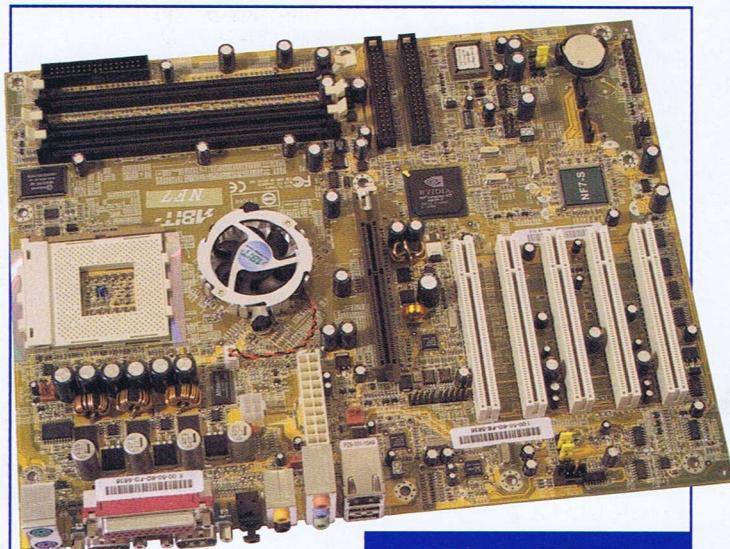
Unfortunately, the same cannot be said about the board's layout. Although the IDE and floppy headers

have been logically placed, the way Abit have positioned the ATX power connector just past the CPU socket means that your thick ATX power cable will be forced to run over the top of your heatsink/fan unit, thus greatly restricting airflow. Furthermore, the NF7-S also lacks the now standard mounting holes around the CPU socket, making it impossible to install heatsink/fan units that don't use the conventional mounting system.

As far as performance is concerned, the nForce 2's dual-channel memory controller enables the board to slightly surpass the VIA KT400-equipped Abit AT7-MAX2 in most cases.

Aside from a few layout issues, the Abit NF7-S is one of the best SocketA motherboards to feature in PCPP Tech, with plenty of quality features, high stability and great performance. If you can live with the minor layout flaws, we recommend the Abit NF7-S to anyone looking at purchasing a new motherboard for their shiny new AthlonXP.

Asher Moses



Abit NF7-S

A high performing, feature-rich motherboard let down by a few obvious layout flaws

85

Maxtor 5000LE External 80GB HDD

■ Price: \$599 ■ Distributor: Ingram ■ URL: www.maxtor.com.au ■ Phone: 9741 2000

Ever suffered the inconvenience of having to burn a plethora of CDs just to make a simple backup of a small hard drive partition? We sure have, and it certainly is both expensive and time consuming. The solution? Introducing the latest addition to Maxtor's extensive line of hard disk drives, the 5000LE. This external drive features fast USB 2.0 connectivity, a 5400RPM rotation speed as well as a whopping 80GB of storage space, removing the slow, cumbersome interface seen on past external storage solutions as well as providing ample storage space that even professional graphics designers and video editors should be pleased with.

Installation was both fast and simple, and can be completed in a matter of minutes. Simply plug the drive into a spare USB port as well as an external power source, install the appropriate drivers, reboot the PC and you're ready to go. Furthermore, one of the handiest features this product possesses is its plug and play ability, meaning that once you've got the drivers installed, you can hot swap the drive at anytime without having to even touch the reboot button. For those that are strapped for space, there's even a handy little stand that allows you to sit the drive on its side, reducing its footprint.

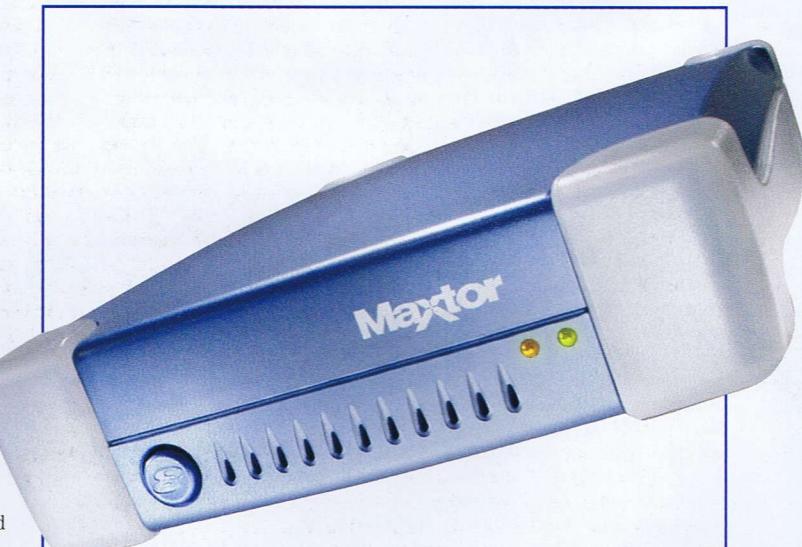
Due to the fact that the drive

primarily sits on the outside of your PC, it was unsurprising to see that Maxtor have spent quite a bit of time creating an aesthetically pleasing, relatively light-weight design for the unit. Although the wiring does get slightly tedious due to the extra cabling required for the external power source, this is understandable considering the fact that USB is only able to carry 5V of power, whereas a hard drive requires a full 12V.

Among the various "general use" tests performed, a little utility called HD_Speed was used to test specific disk performance. For comparison purposes, a Western Digital 120GB ATA100 IDE disk was also tested in order to determine exactly how large the performance hit is when moving from IDE to USB connectivity. As far as read speeds go, HD_Speed reported 13.5MB/sec and 24.8MB/sec for the Maxtor and WD drives respectively, whereas write speeds were 11.8MB/sec and 22.5MB/sec. This performance hit is understandable considering the portable and hot-swappable nature of the drive and certainly sufficient for all of the tasks it was made to perform.

Overall, if you're looking for a portable storage device that features both high speed connectivity and plenty of storage space, you won't be disappointed with the Maxtor 5000LE.

Asher Moses



Maxtor HDD

A fast, high capacity hard drive that is both highly portable and hot-swappable. Recommended.

89

Thermaltake Spark 7

■ Price: \$55.00 ■ Distributor: AusPCMarket ■ URL: www.auspcmarket.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9817 2899

Allow us to introduce ThermalTake's latest Socket478 Pentium 4 offering, the Spark 7.

Aside from its pleasing design, a number of features make this unit stand out from the other competing HSFs currently on the market. Firstly, the Spark 7 is made entirely of copper (aside from the thin aluminium housing), something that is very common with SocketA heatsinks but rarely seen on heatsinks for the Pentium 4. While copper is quite expensive, its heat dissipation performance is clearly superior to that of aluminium.

The heatsink itself is well-designed, featuring a whopping forty six fins that greatly add to the unit's surface area and thus, increase its overall performance. Furthermore, the HSF arrived with a near mirror finish on the base, ensuring that full contact is being made with the processor as well as removing the hassle of lapping it manually.

Also of note is that ThermalTake have decided to bundle a handy fan speed controller with the unit, allowing you to manually adjust the speed of the 70mm fan with the end

result being increased performance or lower noise production.

Thankfully the Spark 7's mounting system is very user-friendly, meaning that the unit can be easily installed or uninstalled without the use of tools such as a screwdriver.

During testing, a P4B 2.4GHz processor was used as well as some Arctic Silver II thermal compound to ensure maximum heat conductivity. Compared to the stock Intel cooler, the Spark 7 performed very respectfully, with idle temperatures of 48C and 42C respectively, as well as load temperatures of 55C and 48C. While the performance of the Spark 7 is great, it is important to note that the high speed fan brings with it a significantly increased noise level (which can be turned down using the fan speed controller but at the expense of cooling performance). That said, if you're purchasing this unit it most likely means that you already have plenty of fans.

The bottom line is, if you're after a new heatsink/fan unit for your P4 processor, the ThermalTake Spark 7 doesn't disappoint.

Asher Moses



Quick Specs

Fan Dimension: 70x70x25 mm
Heatsink Dimension: 82x63x35.5
FAN Speed: 1300 ±10% RPM at 20°C ~ 6000 ±10% RPM at 55°C
Max. Air Flow: 10.42 CFM at 20°C ~ 49.17 CFM at 55°C
Noise: 17 dBA at 20°C; 43 dBA at 55°C
Bearing Type: 2 Ball Bearing
Connector: 3 Pin

ThermalTake Spark 7

High performing and easy to install, albeit noisy and slightly expensive due to its copper construction

93

Zalman CNPS6500B-Cu

■ Price: \$89.00 ■ Distributor: PCCaseGear ■ URL: www.pccasegear.com.au ■ Phone: N/A

Although a block of metal with a fan strapped to the top isn't the most exciting topic for a review, heatsink/fan units are necessary in order to satisfactorily cool all current high-end desktop processors. Thus, some may say that they are the most important component of the entire PC.

The unit on the chopping block today is Zalman's latest socket478 cooler, the CNPS6500B-Cu. Ever since their inception, Zalman have always aimed at providing maximum performance whilst at the same time keeping noise production to a minimum. Is this the case with the CNPS6500B-Cu? Read on.

Upon removing the unit from its box we were baffled by its rather strange design. The CNPS6500B-Cu is different from any other heatsink/fan unit we've tested in that it features a flower-shaped fin and installation involves mounting the fan to a PCI slot above the heatsink rather than being attached to the heatsink itself. This is said to minimize noise output, however, is obviously at the expense of a PCI slot.

You'll be pleased to hear that the CNPS6500B-Cu features a user-friendly mounting system - Simply clip the unit onto the existing P4 heatsink retention mechanism. This is certainly a welcome change as, in the past, many P4 heatsinks required you to remove your whole motherboard

from its case during installation.

Also of note is that, due to the fact that the pure copper heatsink weighs in at a hefty 898 grams, it is highly recommended that you uninstall the unit before transporting your PC.

As far as performance goes, at an ambient temperature of 24C, the Zalman CNPS6500B-Cu outperformed our stock Intel unit by quite a decent margin. Furthermore, although we could only slightly hear our stock Intel HSF whilst it was running, the Zalman unit was literally silent.

Overall, if you're looking for a heatsink/fan unit that provides decent performance whilst at the same time being virtually silent, we have no trouble recommending the Zalman CNPS6500B-Cu. However, at a price of around \$89, it may be slightly out of reach for many of you.

Asher Moses



Performance - Temperature

Idle
Zalman CNPS6500B-Cu: 42
Stock Intel: 45
Load
Zalman CNPS6500B-Cu: 52
Stock Intel: 56



Zalman

Decent performance and virtually silent, however, slightly let down by a high price

80

ThermalTake Hardcano 8 VR

■ Price: \$60.50 ■ Distributor: AusPCMarket ■ URL: www.auspcmarket.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9817 2899

If you're an overclocker, chances are you have a number of fans constantly running inside your PC and thus, are forced to put up with the noise of half a dozen 7000RPM case fans buzzing away while you're trying to get on with work or gaming. However, thanks to the invention of the "fanbus" quite some time ago, this noise does not have to be tolerated all the time. Alternatively you may have a motherboard with only one input for a fan and require more fans for greater cooling inside your PC.

Essentially, a fanbus provides a central wiring connection for all of your system fans, allowing you to either raise or lower the voltage being pumped into them which results in the fans changing their rotational speed. However, previously, the creation of a fanbus involved physically wiring it up yourself, which was both a difficult and time consuming affair, especially for those that aren't experienced with tools such as the soldering iron.

Realising the demand for a more user-friendly product, in recent

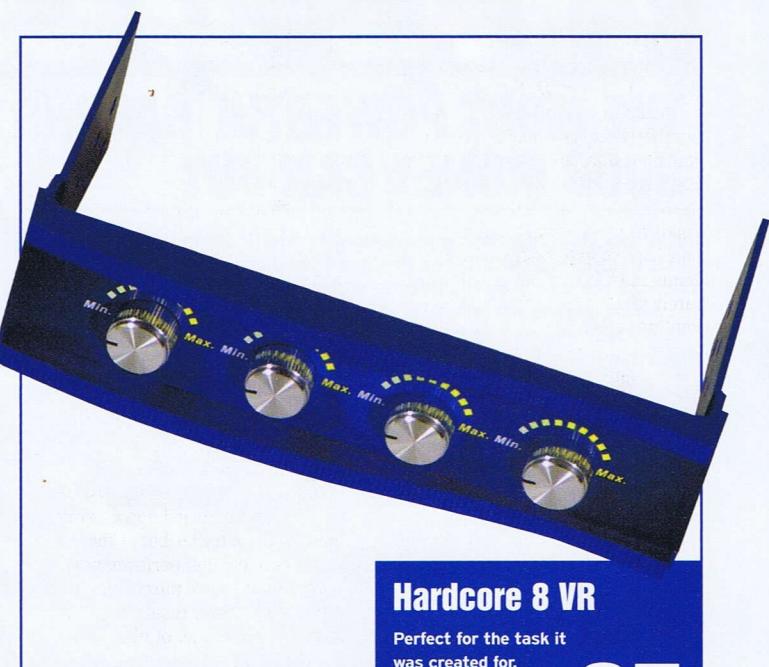
months companies such as ThermalTake have begun mass producing ready-made fanbus devices that not only look professionally made, but save you much time and effort as well.

ThermalTake's latest fanbus device, the Hardcano 8 VR is a relatively simple piece of equipment. It simply slots into one of your 5 1/4" drive bays and features four small knobs on its face plate, giving you the ability to control up to four case fans at any one time.

One aspect of the Hardcano that is especially pleasing is the fact that it does not clutter your system with unnecessary cabling. Hooking up your fans to the device is as simple as plugging the fan into a 3-pin header located at the back of the unit.

All in all, the Hardcano is really quite hard to fault. Whilst the Hardcano 8 VR is certainly not for everyone, if you happen to have a plethora of case fans installed in your PC or require more case fans the ThermalTake Hardcano will serve you well.

Asher Moses



Hardcore 8 VR

Perfect for the task it was created for, slightly expensive and certainly not for everyone

85

Thrustmaster 360 Modena Upad Force

■ Price: \$69.95 ■ Distributor: Harvey Norman ■ URL: www.harveynorman.com.au ■ Phone: 02 9201 6111

Expanding their licensed Ferrari range of game controllers even further, Thrustmaster have recently released their latest gamepad, aptly named the 360 Modena Upad Force. Upon first glance of the controller, it is immediately apparent that the product has been designed with Ferrari in mind. Not only does it feature a red and black colour scheme, but it also has the Ferrari logo plastered all over it as well as various speed gauges and fuel meters that do nothing more than improve the gamepad's aesthetic appearance.

The first and arguably most important aspect of the controller we would like to comment on is its ergonomic design. We gave two people the chance to play with the pad for one hour each, making sure that one had rather large hands and the other had very small hands. You will be pleased to hear that both left feeling very satisfied without any signs of discomfort or blisters from prolonged use. Furthermore, both commented on the pad's logical button placement as well as the fact that they were within comfortable reach during suspenseful gameplay.

Speaking of buttons, the gamepad features two analog sticks that enable you to control four separate axis, as well as an 8-way D-Pad and twelve programmable

quick-action buttons.

As well as this, the pad also includes three pre-configured modes: Digital, Analog and Racing. These simply adjust your control configuration depending on the type of game you're playing. For example, racing mode separates the steering wheel (left mini-stick) and speed (right mini-stick) controls to eliminate interference between them.

Albeit very minor, we did have one small qualm with the pad. We found some of the buttons to be rather loose, and thus, didn't require too much pressure to be activated. Although this is not that big an issue, it does detract somewhat from the overall gaming experience and can get slightly frustrating at times.

Another handy feature touted by the Thrustmaster Modena Upad Force is force feedback support, powered by two 3lb motors. These added a nice touch to gameplay as, unlike previous controllers we've tested, the rumble effect was really quite powerful whilst at the same time being relaxed enough to avoid annoyance.

Overall, if you're looking to enhance your gaming experience through the use of a gamepad, you won't be disappointed with the 360 Modena Upad Force.

Asher Moses



Modena Upad

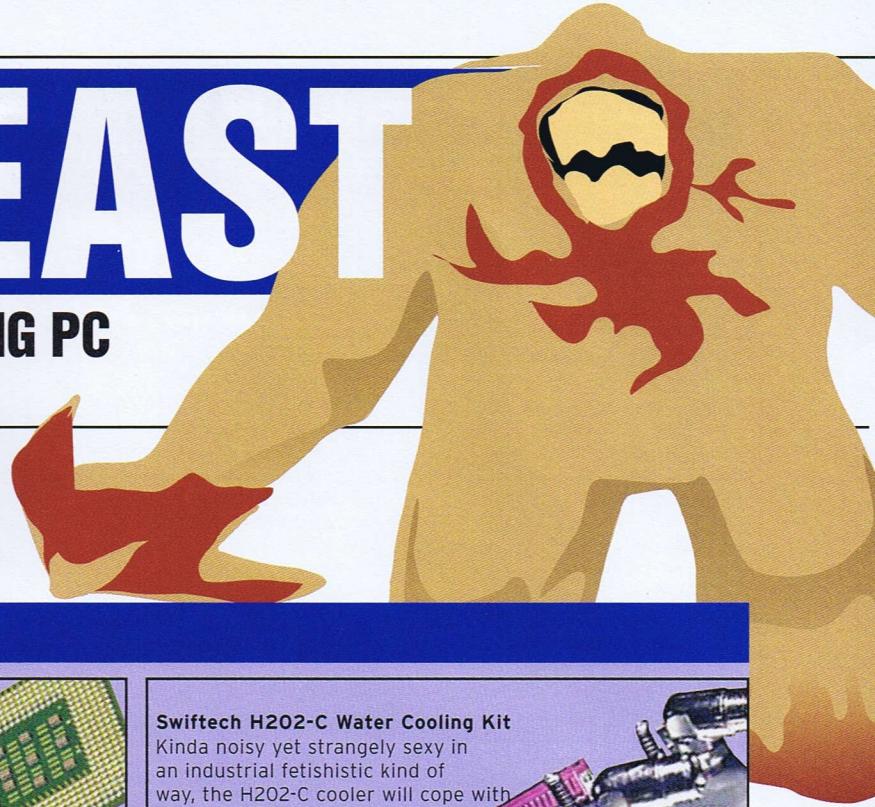
The button layout and design makes it ideal for gamers looking for a more arcade-accurate gaming experience

83

THE BEAST

THE MOST POWERFUL GAMING PC GOOD MONEY CAN BUY

This month sees a nice improvement to the Beast in regard to video card. The Ti4200 has finally dropped to a reasonable enough price to keep the beastie under \$2000 but is now a far superior gaming system. Also, Seagate's latest drive offering significantly ramps up both storage space and transfer rate. Such Beastliness.

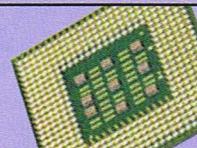


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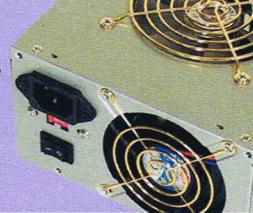
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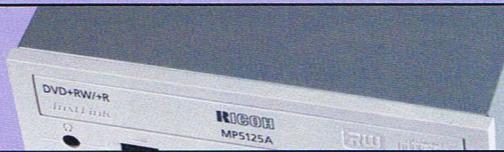
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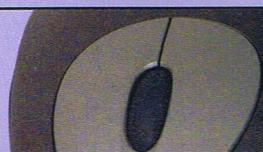
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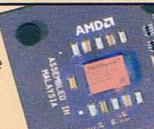
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LETTER OF THE MONTH: RAM ISSUES

Q I have a "6x86-PR150+" Cyrix/IBM processor running Win95 OSR2 on a 5SIM Chaintech motherboard, 64MB SDRAM, a Viewtop Vulcan 2 12MB Voodoo 2, a Viewtop 3D Titan 2000 S3/VirGE/DX 4MB 64bit 2D/3D Graphics Accelerator, a 16bit ViBRA SoundBlaster, a Dick Smith network card, a 52x CD-ROM and a 4.0GB Quantum Fireball. My problems first began when I would try to install IE 4.0 and it would unexpectedly stop during the installation. I have to reformat the disk and reinstall the OS since Windows can't start because of the "Explorer performed an illegal operation please restart" problem. Same problems installing DirectX 7.0. No problems when installing device drivers or some games with DOS installers. So after a fresh install of Windows, I installed the device drivers and then ran a network game of WarCraft 2. When I finally got into a battle with the PC player, the game immediately quit and dropped back to Windows with no error message whatsoever. I'm getting so fed up with the same message at startup "Memory test failed press F1 to continue." All my games are stopping and crashing unexpectedly and the PC is detecting the 64MB SDRAM at startup but somehow the himem.sys file is always corrupt so I can't get into "Safe Mode." So just recently I removed the 64MB of SDRAM hoping to

resolve my problems but unfortunately made things worse. I took both SDRAM chips out and put back one of the old SDRAM chips into the top DIMM socket and turned on the PC. All I could hear from the PC was the internal PC speaker beeping every second just like a digital alarm clock and I could also hear the sound of the disk. So I turned the PC off at the wall socket. I restarted and still the monitor did not flash up even though the green standby light was on and the PC internal speaker kept on beeping. I unplugged all the cords at the back of the PC and plugged in the Hewlett Packard Pavilion 8630 M70 monitor but still the screen did not flash on and the internal PC speaker kept on beeping. I have tried plugging both SDRAM chips into the positions they were originally in but still the PC internal speaker beeps and the screen does not flash on. I have made sure the SDRAM chips are firmly in place and have moved them around. I'm pretty sure it is a problem with the jumper setting but don't know which ones.

Herb Hesketh

A You had me crying by the time I read "6x86-PR150+ Cyrix/IBM processor" so you've stolen LOTM from Barry Boy. You deserve a little affection running a rig like yours. This edited version of Herb's letter is, believe me, much shorter than the original but I think the main learning points are

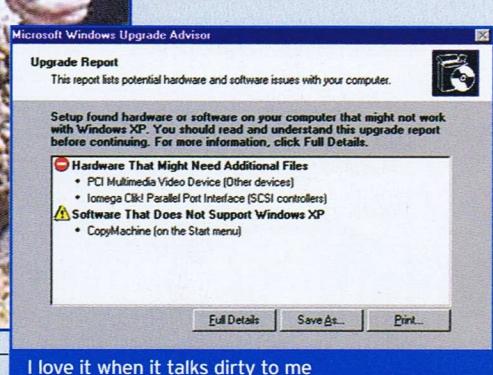
still there. I think the short answer is to clear the CMOS and start again but, being an older BIOS, all the settings need to be recorded, checked and re-entered. The "corrupt himem.sys file" message means that several OS files are corrupt; I once saved a Win9x partition by booting in Win2K and error-checking from there - but no hope here though so try a scandisk. The BIOS alarm may point to a RAM issue, dislodged VGA card or a screwed-up BIOS. Given that the RAM is seated properly and not fried then it could be either the VGA card (loose) or the BIOS (corrupted)? However, "Memory test failed press F1 to continue" is very suspect - maybe it's just bugged and the failure of WC2 to work is indicative of this. Herb also mentioned an IE4 installation problem which I don't understand - except where the software is corrupt or RAM is bad and as all of the registers start to tickle with a game or software installation things crash or stop working. I'd just shoot for Internet Explorer 5.5 because it's not simply a web browser but also a patch for Win95. Many system files are updated during installation and IE5 is also needed for full Y2K compatibility. If you don't want to use IE you can uninstall it again and the updated system files will remain!

DAMN XP!

Q I have recently upgraded my OS from WinMe to WinXP. Many games that I used to play successfully on WinMe (Project IGI or System Shock) don't work because of my graphics drivers. During the SiS website driver installation a box appears stating that there's an error with the "plug and play device". Could you please help me find drivers that work. I looked in Device Manager and found this entry: "SiS 300/305/630/540/730".

Rhys Griffin

A SiS don't provide a video driver "Reference Set" like nVIDIA do (one file set that suits all video adaptors) and from the look of the error message, I'm guessing that you've tried to install the wrong driver set. You'll have to positively ID your video and match it to the correct driver set and this may mean looking inside your case and seeing if there's a model number on the adaptor. The Device Manager entry gives no clue as to whether it's an integrated or a stand-alone GPU - for example, the SiS300 is a GPU suitable for adaptors whereas the SiS730 is an integrated solution and both of these model numbers are provided by your adaptor to Device Manager. So, after you ID your GPU, look at this page <http://www.sis.com/support/drive/r/vga.htm> where the various driver sets are listed. Older product driver sets are available here <http://driver3.sis.com/graphic/gpu/> if needed. Also take a look at <http://support.microsoft.com/default.aspx?scid=kb;en-us;314854> (MSKB Article 314854).



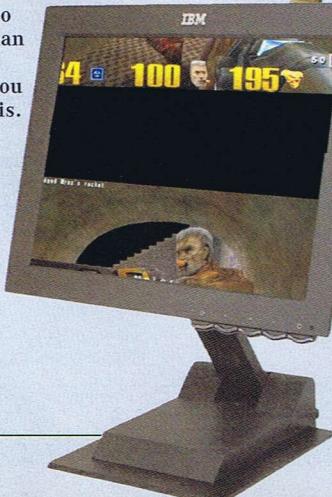
I love it when it talks dirty to me

PROBLEM: EVERYTHING

Q 1. When I go into a game like Quake III the screen position changes, and if I want to get most of the screen I have to continually re-adjust. 2. My dial up Internet connection used to be about 30 secs but since I took that annoying password thing off it has gone up to 1:30! 3. I have a GA-7ZX motherboard with 256MB RAM, Duron 800MHz and a 32MB TNT2 video adaptor. I'm thinking of upgrading to an Athlon 1.73GHz, or even 2GHz, but will it fit and if it does, will it just plug in? Is there anything else I should know?

Chris Taylor

A Well, I'm not surprised your screen does funny things running Q3 on a TNT2 - I would too with all that geometric information trying to scramble out my bottom (Charming metaphor Stu - Ed). The latest Detonator Drivers may ease the pain but don't be too hopeful. The delay when connecting to the Internet is often due to 'fiddling around', as you have done. Fiddling around does all sorts of untold things like request authentication when not required. That 'annoying password thing' is actually quite useful and an automatic logon is possible, too. Tip #1: ring the help line of your ISP and explain that "...hey, it just happened!" or Tip#2: start *inetwiz.exe* from the run line and follow the instructions. The original GA-7ZX with the VIA KT133 AGPset, supported the AMD Athlon/Duron (K7) Socket A processor only (256K/64K 2nd cache on die) but check here http://tw.giga-byte.com/faq/faq_7zfsb.htm to see which Revision you actually have. The 7ZX Rev 5.1 with the VIA KT133A Chipset supports a 133MHz front side bus. If you indeed have just the GA-7ZX then a BIOS upgrade will help as Rev: Fg (12 Apr 2002) in file *7zx_fg.zip* will correctly recognise up to an AMD AthlonXP 2200+ (NB: only for PCB Revision 5.1 or above), correctly recognise an AMD Duron 1.3GHz CPU and provide support for 137GB or bigger disks (wOOT). I reckon the best bang/buck AthlonXP, right now, is the 2100+ running at 1733MHz; it should be closer to \$150 than \$200 when you read this.

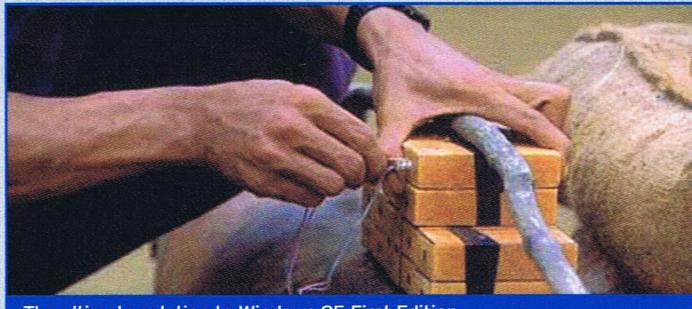


GRAPHICS TROUBLE

Q I have a 64MB GeForce2 MX200 to match what was at the time a fairly new system comprised of a Duron 900MHz, GA-7ZXE, 256MB RAM and a Muse XL running WinXP Pro. I always make sure I turn the graphics down in games but the problem is, for absolutely no reason, in some games, it's as if the game is in slow-motion. Not as in the machine is struggling to run it, but it just goes sloooooowly as in you can jump and it will take ages to land; for example Red Faction, the demo of CDS and Iron Storm, and even CS occasionally. But yet my PC can run BF1942 and UT2003 reasonably. I have tried many different drivers including the Detonators, the ones that actually came with my video card, and also some older Detonators. I also tried many options under the GeForce tab and none of them seem to make a difference. It's like being in constant Max Payne bullet time!!!

Chris Taylor

A Your VIA KT133A AGPset is AGP 2.0 compliant and will support 4x mode. Your MX200 is simply not up to the demands of certain games and is a waste of a good AGP2.0 slot! Depending on the Game Logic, Scene Management, the amount of Geometry Calculations needed and the actual Geometry Bandwidth of your system you will have a reasonable time, as you discovered, a shocker-of-a-time or no-time-at-all playing new games. I wrote in an earlier PCPP issue that shifting the computational load to the GPU [from the CPU] was a key factor in allowing content developers the freedom to move from minimally constructed scenes to extremely complex, life-like worlds; as this is increasingly performed then older nVIDIA chips will run out of steam (as will your Duron!).



The ultimate solution to Windows 95 First Edition

DETONATED DETONATORS

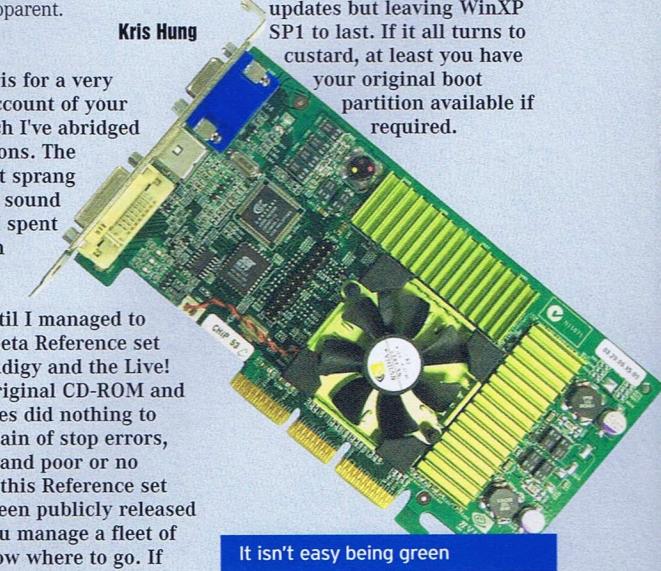
Q I have a - AMD XP1700+, ABIT 8363-686A(KT7A,KT7A-RAID v0.5) MoBo, 256MB PC133 SD-RAM, ASUS GeForce3 Ti500 and SB Live! DE 5.1. I have the latest soundcard drivers, WinXP Service Pack 1 (for DirectX 8.1b) and v23.11 Detonator Drivers. The problem I have is that I cannot use the latest nVIDIA Detonator Drivers. Every time I install them (30.82 and 40.72) the game will start the menu, but when I actually try and play, the game will run for a few seconds, then it will quit back onto the desktop. I have tested this with Rallisport, Challenge Demo and Unreal 2003 Demo. When I run 3DMark 2001 SE, not only does the test run (on default settings) for only a few seconds, but it then quits, then restarts my PC! This has lead me to believe it to be a DirectX or Detonator Driver problem. Currently, I'm using old 23.11 Detonators supplied by your PCPP cover CDs. Although not the fastest or most current drivers available, they are as stable as a rock, I have had absolutely no problems with these drivers, besides the newer games prompting me to update my drivers. I have ignored the need to upgrade my current drivers for a while, but upon downloading the Rallisport Challenge, due to the age of my current drivers, the textures on the cars were none, displaying only black, prompting me for new video card drivers. Despite different techniques at installing, I can't seem to make the newer Detonators work properly. I'm stuck with old drivers and the need for new ones are now apparent.

Kris Hung

A Thanks Kris for a very detailed account of your problem, which I've abridged for space reasons. The first thing that sprang to mind is the sound card drivers. I spent some weeks in SoundBlaster Hell with my Audigy DE until I managed to get a WinXP beta Reference set suiting the Audigy and the Live! ranges. The original CD-ROM and website updates did nothing to alleviate the pain of stop errors, trashed disks and poor or no sound. Sadly, this Reference set has still not been publicly released although if you manage a fleet of HPs you'll know where to go. If

you purchased your PC new and it's under guarantee then ask the vendor to fix the problem. Move the SBLive! as far away from the AGP as you can - PCI Slot #6 in your case. You haven't mentioned anything about VIA KT133A/VIA 686B chipset driver updates - make this a priority and check the website. The KT7A has many BIOS revisions available for it at the abit.com.tw/ website. Two are of interest:

"kt73r.exe, Issue Date: 2001/07/05, BIOS ID: 3R [with a note] - For Creative SBLive! 5.1 sound card users, you may try these two options while experiencing sound quality issues. PCI master read caching, default setting=Disabled PCI master time-out, Default setting=1. Setting above options to Disabled/3 will lead to the same result with VIA Latency Patch V0.14 and may help SBLive! 5.1 sound issues. If the system experiences low performance after these settings, enable the PCI master read caching please" and "kt7a9.exe, Issue Date: 2002/07/11 BIOS ID: A9. Fix nVIDIA GeForce4 Ti400 AGP card compatible issue with WinXP". What's to say that your Ti500 doesn't have the same issues? Your board is also a three DIMM socket puppy so keep RAM out of Slot #3. A drastic solution is to purchase and download a program like DriveImage from Powerquest.com. Image your boot drive to another disk (yes, you should have a second, "data disk" with two or more partitions!), reformat the boot drive and start again, loading the OS and its native drivers, then vendor updates but leaving WinXP SP1 to last. If it all turns to custard, at least you have your original boot partition available if required.



It isn't easy being green

ENHANCED MUSIC CD

Q How the hell do I get music and data onto one CD-R for God's sake? Don't ask why, I'm just going insane with Nero.

BarryBoy

A Err, not a gaming issue, unless you rip or record some game sound, convert it to Red Book digital audio format, burn it as a first session then put all the Read.me, patches and updates in the second session - that's pretty close to a gaming issue, eh? Many game phreaks 'archive' their experiences to disc. Sound tracks, save games, patchez, hackz, crackz, you name it they have it on mixed mode CD-Rs. So, I know why but how can vary. The short answer is to use the Nero wizard and go for mixed mode. There are some pitfalls that you need to be aware of though.

Mixed Mode CDs comprise a combination of, usually, one data track plus up to 98 audio tracks. Such discs should only play the audio tracks on a CD audio player, while the data track will play on a PC. Since the Red Book (audio format) was written at a time when CD-ROM was not considered, Mixed Mode can cause problems when playing on audio players. In particular, it is important to prevent audio players trying to play the data track(s). There are several different methods of implementing a mixed mode disc: Data in Track 1. In one type of mixed mode CD the first track of a CD is a CD-ROM data track. But some early CD players will try to read the data track with possibly disastrous consequences so this method tends not to be used except for applications where it is unlikely to be played on a CD audio player. Not recommended. CD-ROM Ready: This is one name for mixed mode discs where the data 'track' is hidden in the pause before track 1 (an audio track) begins. Too tech for mere-mortals. CD-i Ready: Another type of mixed mode disc, where the same problem has been partly solved in a similar way, is the CD-i Ready disc. This is a CD with the CD-i data hidden in the pause preceding the audio tracks. Ugh! Commercially produced for consumer and business use. CD Extra or Enhanced CD: These formats ensure that CD audio players don't play the data, but there are still problems running these discs on some older CD-ROM drives. Enhanced Music CDs are a type of mixed mode CD developed by Philips and Sony in conjunction with other companies such as Microsoft and Apple. Often referred to as CD EXTRA or CD Plus these discs contain two sessions. The first session contains up to 98 audio tracks; the second session contains the data track. When played on an audio player, it only sees the first session and so does not try to play the data session.



The specification (the Blue Book) is based on the multisession pressed disc specification with some application specific additions for handling lyrics, titles and stills.

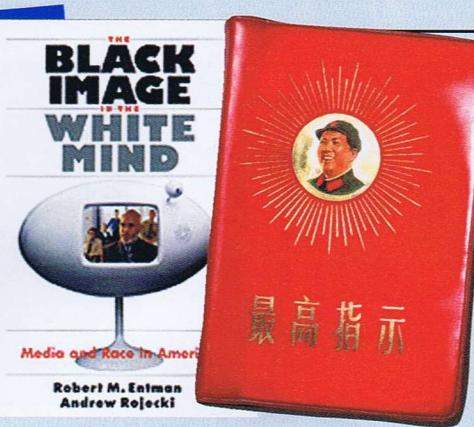
CD EXTRA discs, according to the Blue Book, are intended to be played on dedicated hardware as well as PCs. Therefore the data formats to be used are defined closely in a similar way to the White Book specification for Video CD. CD EXTRA discs are intended to be playable on a wide range of hardware including PCs under Win95 and later, Macintosh PCs, and dedicated CD Extra players (but not CD-i players which cannot play CD EXTRA discs). CD EXTRA discs are multi-session discs containing two sessions. This is what Nero will give you: Session one contains up to 98 tracks of audio data conforming to the Red Book specification. The playing time of this audio will be reduced by the length of session two. Session two contains one track of CD-ROM XA (ie Mode 2) sectors and must include certain specified files and directories and use the ISO 9660 file system. For Macintosh compatibility, it is possible to make the data track include HFS as well as ISO9660. The following directories and files are required:

An AUTORUN.INF file in the root directory which meets the Windows Autoplay specification. A CDPLUS directory containing general information, lyrics and MIDI data. A PICTURES directory containing pictures encoded in both MPEG and other formats. An optional DATA directory containing additional data files depending on the application. A large proportion of CD singles now are CD EXTRA discs and normally use Apple QuickTime videos plus text and graphic information related to the music on the discs. Phew, good luck!

GEFORCE TROUBLES

I just recently got a GeForce4 MX440 (ASUS WinFast A170 DDR T) and I've found that it keeps freezing on me during games and only in games like FIFA2003 and WarCraft, etc. I'm running WinXP on a P3-800MHz (terrible specs but will upgrade to beastie level soon!).

Johnny Wu



Did you load the ASUS driver set that came with the adaptor or did you load the nVIDIA Detonators, or did you use the native WinXP drivers? I can only suggest that you uninstall the current drivers, remove the A170 via Device Manager and start again with the native drivers, then the A170 installation disc, then the Detonators and evaluate each installation for stability. You should also check your soundcard and modem drivers as they can contribute to what can seem like video instability. Depending on your motherboard and how stable you feel it really is overall, I would consider installing the Intel, AMD or VIA, or as otherwise appropriate, chipset drivers as well. Check the CPU temperature and the heatsink/fan because it could just be a little overall heat getting to the system if you have a small or cluttered case.



G-Force, geddit?

CRAZY ATHLON

I read the article HOT HOT HOT but your help didn't help me. I just changed to a A7V8X with a huge Seagate and four case fans. I installed a new 128MB Ti4200, a Volcano 9 CoolMod and two Hardcanos and it still just restarts in the middle of anything. I know it's not heat or drivers because they are all the latest.

Harry

Hey, great stuff in that new box but potential ash if the heatsink and fan are not mated to the CPU effectively. At great risk of incurring a libel suit, I just don't recommend Volcano HSFs. Look

around the reviews - they just don't cut the mustard and I have over a hundred bucks worth sitting on the shelf doing nothing but looking pretty cool (not!).

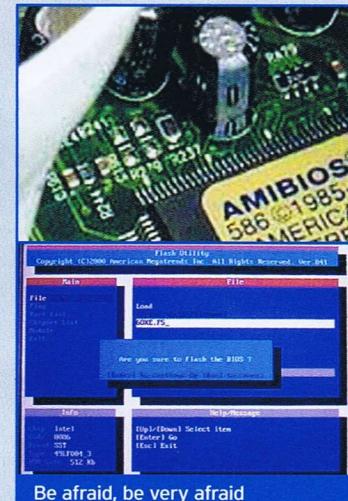


BIOS FLASHING

I own a GA-6VTXE and I want to flash its BIOS to the latest one. How do I flash it? I'd like to know how to overclock my GF3. Also how can I change the settings on my GeForce AGP, from 2x to 4x. I have a Celeron-1.3 and Ti200.

LOST WACKO

Umm - why do you need to upgrade the BIOS? For your VIA 694T chipset, the BIOS upgrade fixes: a P-III 1000MHz/256k cache/133MHz FSB/1.475V boot failure and Boot Problems with the ATI8500 VGA adaptor...any of these problems yours? Instructions are here <http://tw.giga-byte.com/support/bios.htm> anyway. Overclocking video adaptors, like all OC I guess, is not for the faint hearted - check out www.overclockers.com.au for some tips and tricks. The AGP settings can be changed in the BIOS of the motherboard. But your GA-6VTXE should recognise the Ti200 and enable AGP 2.0 4x automatically.



Be afraid, be very afraid

EAX2 VS AUREAL3D

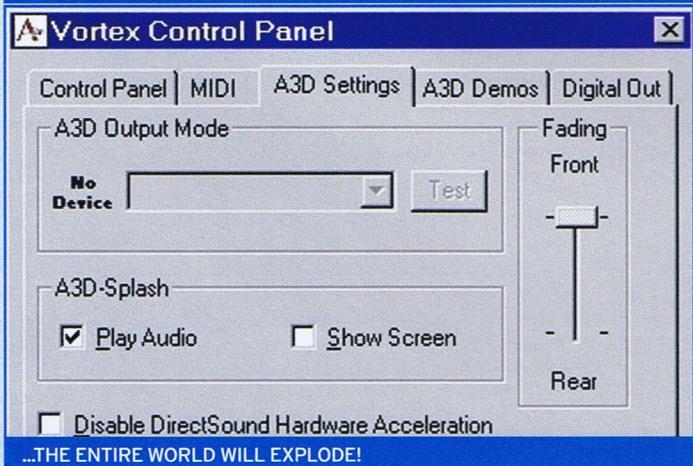
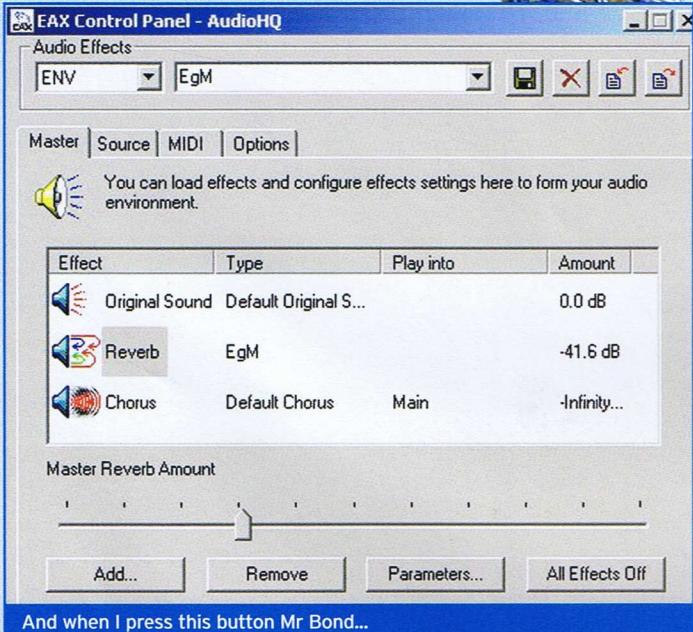
I was wondering what the difference was between Aureal 3D and EAX2? Which one would be better? Also I'm thinking of buying a 4.1 speaker system and I'm deciding between Creative and Cambridge. Is there much difference in quality between the brands? Thanks heaps for your help, keep it up.

Willy

Aureal3D or A3D, is a proprietary Application Programming Interface (API) for handling 3D positional sounds and Doppler effects. Notably, A3D simulates 3D positional sounds on two speakers. A3D will support four or more speakers, but is optimised for two. Interestingly enough, it was developed using algorithms initially developed by NASA.

EAX or Environmental Audio is Creative Labs' proprietary 3D sound algorithm based on reverb (the result of sound reflecting off many surfaces). The result is a number of echoes, which often adds a pleasing resonant quality to music. EAX is an extension to DirectSound3D which allows a developer to choose from a number of reverb sound effect presets that trigger, for example, when the gamer enters a specifically sized room or environment.

Based on the A3D 2.0 standards, I think Aureal3D is a better implementation of effects but it's more difficult and time consuming for game developers to implement. Once implemented though, it's certainly easier for them to modify. As for quality issues with regard to the speaker sets I think you'll need to judge that for yourself. I looked at sets from both vendors and like what I saw.



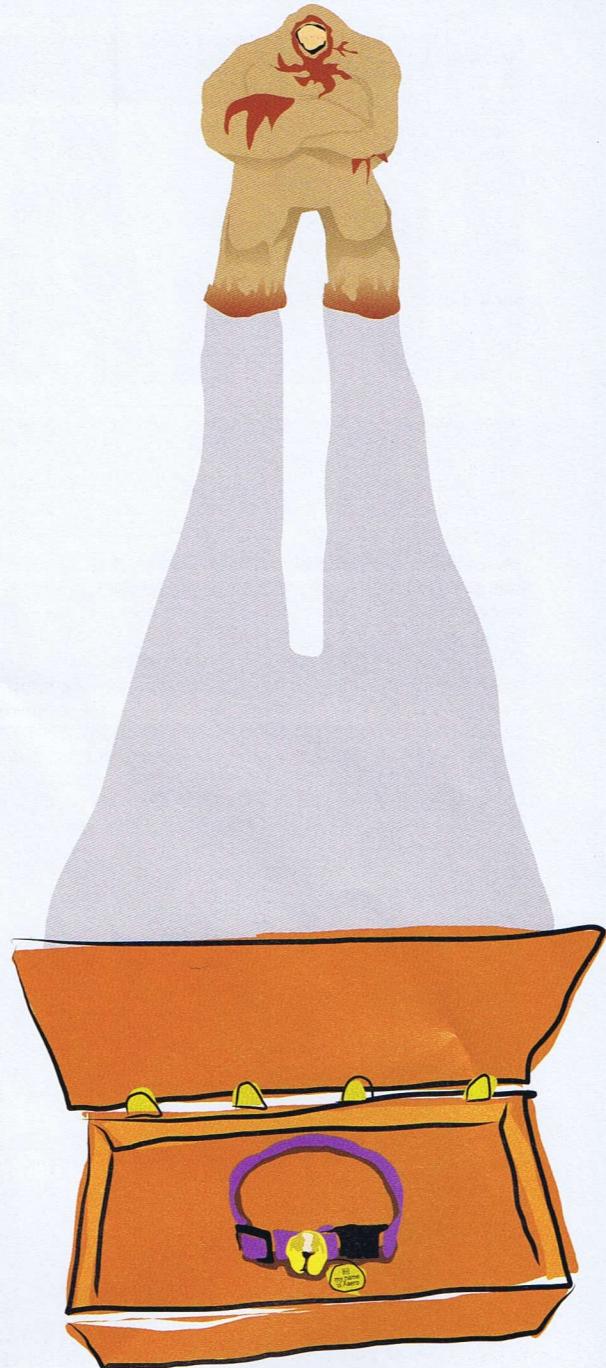
NETWORK WOES

I have an MSI K7T266 Pro2-A, a Duron-1.3, 256MB DDR RAM, GeForce4 440MX and WinXP. I cannot install my network card. Everytime I boot into WinXP it finds the NIC, finds the drivers and tries to install it. The error says "Cannot install this hardware. There was a problem installing this hardware: Ethernet Controller. An error occurred during the installation of the device. The Data is Invalid." I have tried four different NICs and all have the same problem. I have all the new VIA chipset drivers.

Derek

Without knowing the brand or model of the NIC, I can't offer much hard advice. It may be related to the age or model of the NICs themselves although my installation of XP Pro is quite happy with an old Intel 10/100. The MSI BIOS updates provide no clues and you say you've installed the latest chipset drivers. Try removing as many PCI adaptors as you reasonably

can. Keep the NIC as the only PCI adaptor, let WinXP attempt to install it, then add the other PCI adaptors one by one.



**CONSIDER THIS
A WARNING,
NEXT TIME, THE HEAD
WILL STILL BE
ATTACHED!**

THE ORACLE

WRITE TO THE ORACLE AT:

The Oracle
PC Powerplay
78 Renwick St
Redfern
NSW 2016

oracle@pcpowerplay.com.au

Are you the gamer who has to chase up every single little thing in a game to be satisfied? Or do you just do what's needed to get through? Should a Morrowind player with an elephantine memory continue to fret over a rusty key? Why explore the entire 8 planets of Alioth in Star Trek Bridge Commander if the Cardassians spank your arse every time? The Oracle serves up these weighty philosophical matters with a side order of fries for your delectation.



CODE

Kohan: Ahriman's Gift

During game press [Enter] and type any of the following codes:
wooden rabbit: faster construction
scene 24: full map
im gonna rush: increase company limit
more peons: increase production limit
cavas: summon cavaliers
goons: summon dragoons
ebs: summon elite bowmen
egs: summon elite grenadiers
goats: summon goat archers
shades: summon shadelings
sks: summon shadow knights
voids: summon void beasts
demons: win the mission



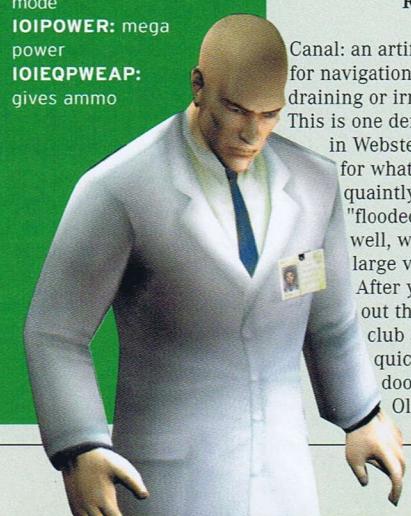
Earth 2150

Press [Enter] and type **i_wanna_cheat**. Then press [SHIFT] + O + [ENTER] - use the O on the keypad. Next hit [Enter] and type the cheat. (# = Numerical value)
x-mas_pack: repair and reload ammo
fireworks: get mines
i_love_this_game #: Give # of CR
i_hate_limits #: Set Unit Limit to #
einstein 1: Fast Explore On (O for Off)
help_me_please!!! 1: Fast Explore On - Player Only (O for Off)
the_hammer_of_thor: Kill All Enemies at Range of 8
massacre: Kills All Objects at Range of 8
see_you_next_life: Destroy Selected Unit

hasta_la_vista_enemigos: Destroy All Visible Units and Objects
bad_time_bad_place: Damage All Near Units
eagle_eye: See All
let_be_darkness: Fog
no_one_hides: See All Units
no_more_secrets: Full Map
Armageddon: Meteor Shower
Dirt_cheap_research: cheap research
Time_is_relative: fast research
gimme_money: Unlimited Money

Hitman 2 : Silent Assassin

Firstly, use a text editor to add the following line to the file Hitman2.ini:
EnableCheats 1
During game play, type any of the following codes:
IOIRULES: toggle god mode
IOIGIVES: all weapons and items
IOIHITLEIF: health
IOISLO: toggle slow motion
IOIER: toggle bomb mode
IOIHITALI: toggle ali mode
IOILEPOW: toggle special attack mode
IOIGRV: toggle force of gravity mode
IOINGUN: toggle nail rifle mode
IOIPOWER: mega power
IOIEQPWEAP: gives ammo



Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare

I'm writing to ask you if you could tell me the code to the chapel wall in the game, because I'm trying to get back inside the house.

James Neti, Artarmon

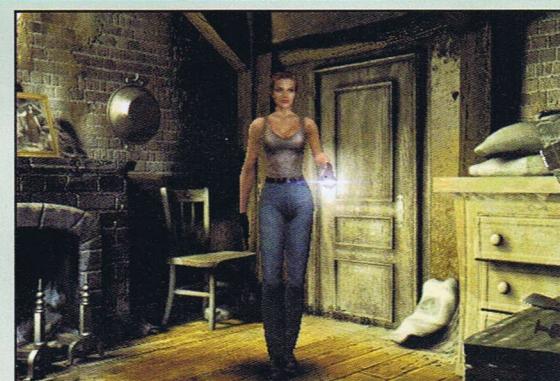
Obviously you picked up the wirecutters near the airplane to break into the chapel. The code for the panel can be worked out by having a good look around. Use those Eagle Eyes Jim! Read the book next to the panel, it will mention 3 sacred symbols which are the codes. There's also talk of blood sacrifices - eh? Looks like you'll need a blood detector! When you picked up the wire cutters, did you also pick up a blue lens? Attach it to your torch and start your new career as a forensic pathologist by looking in the chapel for the first symbol, then check out the rest of the island for the other 2 symbols. One's in the forest map, and the other's in a cave on the shore map, after you cross the marsh.

Deus Ex

How do I find the flooded road in Hong Kong in Deus Ex?

Ransom, e-mail

Canal: an artificial waterway for navigation or for draining or irrigating land. This is one definition found in Webster's Dictionary for what Ransom so quaintly calls a "flooded road". Ah well, we can't all have large vocabularies. After you've checked out the Lucky Money club and raided the quickstop next door, head for the Old China Hand



Star Trek

(Bridge Commander, Episode 5, Mission 2) I really need some help with stealth scanning of the Alioth system Alioth 1 through 8. I've been stuck on it for weeks. I usually have a go, things are working out OK then BANG they've located me. I turn all shields and weapons off turn sensors down divert to nav points, nothing works. Then I sigh and turn on another game, but I love my Star Trek. I couldn't open a channel to the Romulan star empire to borrow a cloaking device, so I comm linked you.

All channel distress call MAYDAY.

WhiteStar, e-mail

Never fear White Star, the Oracle will see you right. Ok, Admiral Liu has given you the mission to find a Cardassian outpost the USS Geronimo is tracking. You managed to track it to



Prendel 3, to a Nav Point called "strange readings". So far so good, but once you've destroyed this outpost, the Admiral sends you to Alioth which is where your problems begin. I know that you're supposed to explore every planet in Alioth, but seeing as you're having so much trouble, why don't you just warp to Alioth 6 where there's 2 satellites orbiting it. If you destroy them a Cardassian patrol will warp in which you'll have to deal with or else, you could maintain an orbit 50kms away as you scan the planet. Once Miguel detects the device, Data goes down to planet side in a shuttle. Next, a large Cardassian strike force will arrive and you'll be forced to warp to Starbase 12, leaving Data behind. That's it for Episode 5 - don't worry about Data, he gets rescued in Episode 7.

Fallout Tactics

I'll get straight down to business. How the hell do you get the vehicles in Fallout Tactics to work in missions other than the mission you find them in? You've got to be able to use them because there is a screenshot on the box where there is an APC in the Super Mutant Bio-Tank Mission. Also are there any cheats for RA2?

Ransom, e-mail

Ransom, did you think I wouldn't notice you'd sneaked in another question! Well, I'll get straight down to business too. You've fallen victim to "concept artwork syndrome" where a gamer mistakes a piece of artwork for what can really happen in the game. You're not the first - a reader in issue 82 made the same mistake about some artwork for The Thing. While it's possible to collect vehicles in the game and move them around the game world, you can't take them into mission spaces if they're not programmed to be there. Thanks to Paul McInnes, Lead Designer at Microforte for confirming that one. As for RA2 cheats? Hmph! I've answered 2 questions - that's enough!



You've fallen victim to "concept artwork syndrome" where one mistakes art for real gameplay

CODE

Age of Mythology

During play, press [Enter] and type in any code. Code must be in capitals.

ATM OF EREBUS: 1000 Gold
TROJAN HORSE FOR SALE: 1000 Wood

JUNK FOOD NIGHT: 1000 Food

MOUNT OLYMPUS: Full favor

LAY OF THE LAND: Hide map

UNCERTAINTY AND DOUBT: Win game

THRILL OF VICTORY: Win game

CHANNEL SURFING: Skips to the next campaign scenario

L33T SUPA H4X0R: Fast build

DIVINE INTERVENTION: Allows use of a previously used god power

PANDORAS BOX: several random god powers

WRATH OF THE GODS: Lightning Storm, Earthquake, Meteor and Tornado god powers

GOATUNHEIM: god power that turns all units on the map to goats

FEAR THE FORAGE: walking berry bushes god power

BAWK BAWK BOOM: chicken-meteor god power

I WANT TEH MONKEYS!!!: Gives you a bunch of monkeys

WUV WOO: Gives you a flying purple hippo

TINES OF POWER: Gives you a forkyboy

O CANADA: Gives you a Lazer bear

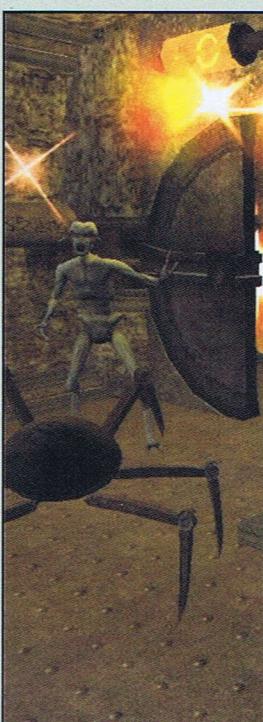
ISIS HEAR MY PLEA: Gives heroes from the campaign

CONSIDER THE INTERNET: Slows down units

SET ASCENDANT: Reveals all animals on map

IN DARKEST NIGHT: Changes game time to night

RED TIDE: Turns water red



Morrowind

Thanks mate, you have saved my sanity. I had been up on that bloody shelf before, but I didn't look to the left. I have been on-line at elderscrolls.com and printed out the instructions, I have talked to someone who had found it, but it wasn't until The Oracle at PCPowerplay gave me instructions that I finally found it. I wonder if The Oracle can tell me where the lock for the strange key I now have is?

Roy Collins, E-mail

Thank you for the feedback Roy, nice to know the Oracle earns his lunch money. That key opens the locked door in the Heaven's Gallery area of the ruins of Arkngthand where you were looking for the puzzle box. You may have opened the door another way and then found

Black and White: Creature Isles

Q Oh mighty Oracle, will you help me?

I am playing the expansion to Black and White and I can't do some of the brotherhood trials. Can you tell me how to pass Nazzle the Bear's trial, that racing trial with the Tortoise and the fighting trial with the Rhino? Oh and how can I get Tyke to learn to build?

Rachel, e-mail

A Rachel, that's 4 questions - can't you figure out anything by yourself? Obviously not. 1. To save Nazzle the Bear, you've got 2 choices. At night, cast Invisibility miracle on your creature so he can sneak past the hermit, avoiding the wolves at the base of the hill who can smell him. Then destroy the windmill to release Nazzle. Or, if you have the influence and the miracle put a teleport in the town and one next to the bear and make your creature use it. You need to have taken over the Japanese town to do this. 2. Orrin is not a sporting tortoise, he doesn't race fairly, but if you follow him first, you'll learn the best route. To beat him you'll either need the Shrink miracle from the Japanese village and the Freeze miracle from the Celtic village. If you only have the Freeze miracle, then payback Orrin by freezing him, then cast Speed Up miracle on your creature so it can burn around the course. If you do have the Shrink miracle, then your

creature can take the shortcut which runs near a valley and begins near 2 Egyptian obelisks. If you have both Shrink and Freeze then the tortoise is soup. 3. Naxo the rhino has the Source which is why his attacks are so powerful. Naxo is a nasty piece of work, with all that rock hurling, lightning bolt zapping and going invisible but here's some tips: Your creature needs to be strong, well rested and fed before going into battle. You need to know how your creature fights, even a sooky ape can beat it - you don't have to use the leopard. Always heal at 50% health and don't bother with other miracles on your creature - Heal is the most important one. Naxo is immune to offensive miracles so just wear Naxo down, he'll drop eventually. If you want Tyke to help by casting miracles, save game first, you never know what the lil booger will do and if he casts a miracle that disrupts the fight completely (like shrink) then you'll have to start the trials all over again. 4. Finally to teach Tyke to build - this is ridiculously simple - I can't believe you're even asking this one - Lukely tells you to leash your creature to the wonder and learn building. Put Tyke there and he'll learn too, he likes to copy what the creature does - haven't you noticed?



the key, so it's now a piece of junk. There's some random loot in Heaven's Gallery, such as a dwemer longsword or bracer and cuirass - which is useful to a low level character but not worth the trip back if you've moved on in the game. Move on, Roy!



Doom Episode 1, Phobos Anomaly

This might sound like a dumbass question, but is there anyway to finish the last level in Episode 1 of Doom? When you kill the two Barons of Hell, the walls come down, you turn on the switch so the stairs rise up and then you enter the black room with something like 25 demons and if you kill them all, you still lose health and you eventually die unless you type the code IDBEHOLDV. I've been trying to finish this for about 4 years with and without cheats but I still can't pass it! Am I doing something wrong or is there something that I missed?????

Troy Williams, e-mail

You've been doing it right all these years. Yep, that's right, once you kill the Barons, you'll end up in that room with a whole poop-your-pants load of demons. Dying is normal and the only way you can progress to the next level. Cheating allows you to survive but it's not how the game's meant to be. Ah... games can be cruel, can't they?

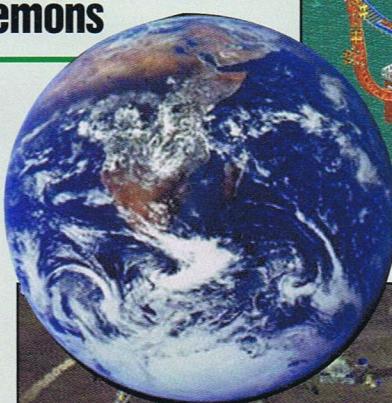


You've been doing it right all these years. Yep, that's right, once you kill the Barons, you'll end up with a whole poop-your-pants load of demons

Earth 2150

Help me Oracle you're my only hope (not likely but worth a shot). I am at present stuck on the Great Lakes scenario of the Eurasian Dynasty campaign. I have cleared out all the enemy on the map, however the second goal for the map is to explore the alien space ship. My difficulty lies in the fact that I cannot get a unit to enter the spaceship, the entrance is too small to permit entrance, and there seems to be no point at which the construction unit can tunnel into that part of the map.

Mudpigs, email

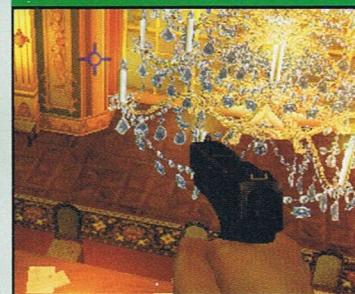


Well Mudpigs, take a step of faith! You can indeed tunnel through - just not directly. Dig a long trench around the impenetrable area to reach the spaceship. Once there, recover the secret computer files.

CODE

James Bond 007 : Nightfire

Select Codenames, then Secrets Unlock and type in the following codes:
PASSPORT: select level
BOWLER: unlocks Odd Job
JANUS: unlocks Xenia
NUCLEAR: unlocks Christmas Jones
VOODOO: unlocks Baron Samedi
BLACKTIE: unlocks Bond Tux
MIDAS: unlocks Goldfinger
DENTAL: unlocks Scaramanga
ASSASSIN: unlocks destruction mode
TNT: unlocks assassination mode
SCOPE: unlocks explosive scenery
BOOM: unlocks Goldeneye strike
ORBIT: max gold
GUARDIAN: unlocks protection mode
TEAMWORK: unlocks Team King Of The Hill option
TRANSMIT: unlock Uplink mode



CODE

RollerCoaster Tycoon II

Re-name one of your guests to one of the following:
Chris Sawyer Takes pictures of rides
Simon Foster Makes portraits of rides
John Wardley Constantly thinks, "Wow!"
John Mace Pays double price
Damon Hill Drives Go-Karts twice as fast as others
Mr. Bean Drives Go-Karts

twice as slow as others
Katie Brayshaw Waves at guests
Melanie Warn Guest becomes very happy and stays in park
Andy Hine Says strange things after getting off rides
Elissa White She loves Intamin rides
David Ellis Says "And here we are on <Insert name of ride>



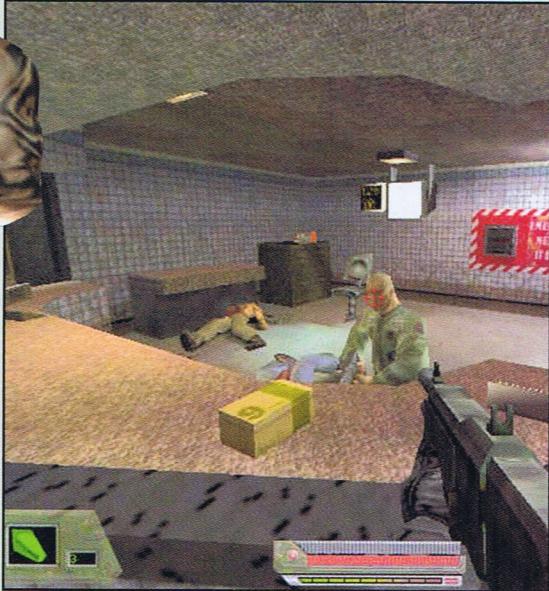
Soldier of Fortune (Platinum)

I am really stuck in SoF platinum. I'm in the stage in New York where I have to catch Sabre. I chase him through the tunnels and subways, then he goes into a building. I kill everyone in the building and outside in the alley (I saved the hostages as well). That's as far as I can go. I walked all through the building and alley but I just don't know where or what to do next. Please help me as I'm about to throw my pc out the window. Thanks, and by the way do you know of any cheats I can use. The only ones I can find are for SoF1 or SoF2 not the platinum edition. Thanks.

Steve, e-mail

Hey Steve, isn't there supposed to be a Brady Games Strategy Guide included with SoF Platinum?? You did find it on the disk... right? Hmm, maybe it's not a very good strategy guide - anyway, you've saved the hostages. Very good. Behind the ticket booth is a switch to open a shutter, you'll have to crouch down. Go through the shutter and down the steps, until you reach the subway. Jump down on the tracks and go left. Bad guys will jump you (so what's new?) but there are civilians around also, so watch your fire. Be careful not to trigger subway cars on the tracks. Duck into the alcoves along the sides if you do. Follow the tracks to the end and enter the shutter on your right. Keep walking until you see a SWAT member get killed. Kill the terrorists responsible for that, then go upstairs to see 2 SWATS and a couple of Sabre's henchman they've arrested.

Follow Hawk to the balcony and jump down onto the train, which will start moving. To the left you'll see another train with 3 terrorists on it. Jump onto this train and kill them to finish the mission. As for cheat codes, the ones for the original Soldier of Fortune will work. It's the same game, after all. The Platinum version just has new multiplayer levels, the strategy guide, plus a preview of SoF2.



CODE

Empire Earth : The Art of Conquest

Enable the Cheat codes option at the set up screen. During play press [Enter] and type any of the following codes:

my name is methos: full map and all resources
all your base are belong to us: 100,000 of all resources
atm: 1000 more gold
you said wood: 1000 more wood
rock&roll: 1000 more rock
creative: 1000 more iron
boston food sucks: 1000 more food
asus drivers: full map
display cheat: display all codes
somebody set up us the bomb: win game
ahhhcool: lose game
the big dig: no resources
boston rent: no gold
uh, smoke?: no wood
slimfast: no food
girlyman: no iron
mine your own business: no rock
headshot: remove objects from map
bam: reveal entire map and remove fog of war

columbus: view fish and animals

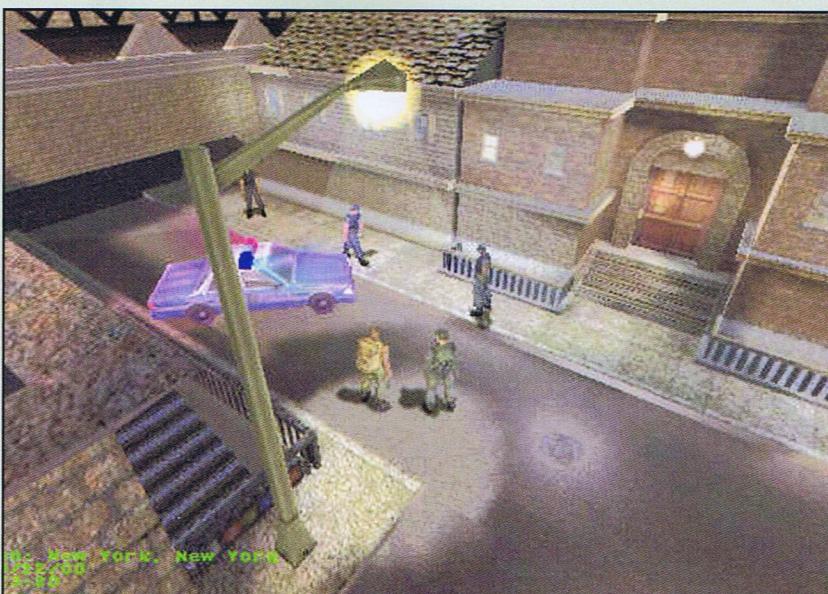
i have the power: restore energy to selected prophet/hero/mana user

brainstorm: instant building and research

coffee train: building of all structures completed

the quotable patella: free upgrade to lvl.10 for all units (not citizens)

friendly skies: planes refuelled in mid-air



Through the Mirror

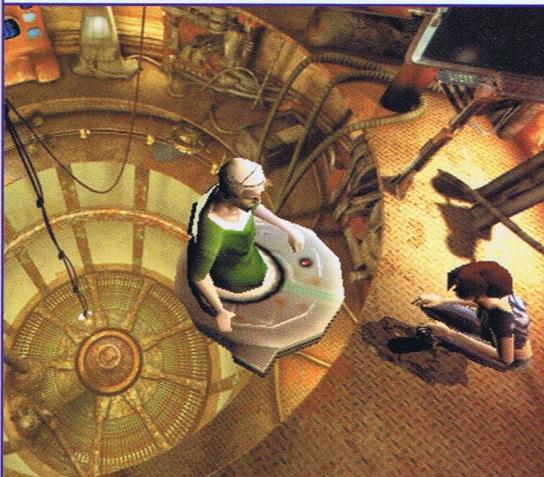
Q I'm stuck at the beginning of the game in Through the Mirror. I know I need to get this ket that is on the tracks in the subway station but I can't get it. There's a rubber duck stuck down outside my window and I can't get it. Is it essential? What do I do?

Cass, e-mail

A The Oracle began his long days years ago, in the mists of time, playing just this brand of inane puzzler. Of course, back then they were funny with oddly shaped characters. They weren't like episodes of Felicity, or tampon commercials or liberal sexuality lessons. Adventure? Not my idea of it. It's called the longest journey because there are so many stupidly illogical puzzles to overcome. Of course, you lack even an ounce of sense if you failed to get that stupid duck. You need it. You picked up the bread

from the cafe, right? Of course, you did - this isn't KQ5, now is it? Use the bread on the floating rubber ducky. This provokes a bird's attack on the poor inflationary and it floats away. Use the chain to pull up the clothes line. Take this item, you need it. Just outside The Fringe, you will find the deflated rubber duck. Take it, you'll need it.

If you haven't done so already, take the Band-Aid off it. Remember the clamp you got from that other stupid puzzle with the gas valve? You need that too. Combine the clothes line with the clamps in your inventory. Use your mouth on the duck to blow it up, then use it on the clamp with the clothes line thing. Now use this piece of modern engineering on the key on the railway track. Voila! You have the key. Now you need to find where to use it... but you didn't ask that question did ya?



THE DISCO



REQUESTS

We welcome requests so please forward your requests to Disc Producer Paul Noone via email at cdgod@next.com.au or write to PCPP DVD Requests, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016



DVD OR CDS NOT WORKING?

PC PowerPlay can only replace discs that are faulty at the time of purchase, not after the fact. Replacement discs cannot be purchased, so please take good care of them. If your disc is damaged or doesn't function as intended then please contact Paul Noone immediately by phone or email - Phone: Sydney 02 9699 0333 Email: cdgod@next.com.au



The free games are back! That's right! At least for the next two issues anyway, because to celebrate the release of C&C Generals EA has generously provided us - and thus you - with the original Red Alert!

Now, some may hold up C&C as the real beginning of the mainstream RTS craze, but it will Red Alert that really cemented the genre as a cash cow.

But it's a difficult beastie to find these days, down in the sticky mess at the bottom of the bargain bins, in a squashed box. Why put yourself at risk of disease when you can have it here, now?

This month we provide you with the Allied singleplayer disc on both the CD and DVD versions of PC PowerPlay. All the FMV and missions from the 'good' side are here, as well as the full multiplayer and skirmish games, so you'll be able to get your hands on that funky Soviet hardware. If you want to see Stalin and Natasha's naughty antics though, you'll have to wait to PCPP#84, when the Red Army conquers the coverdisc.

Beyond the free game though, we've got the stupidly massive Neverwinter Nights demo for CD and DVD readers.

Speaking of behemoths, DVD readers also get The Sims Online. This limited beta test does require a credit card to join, but there are more than 300,000 people in there already so there will be plenty to do. Everybody gets Warcraft 3 though. This is more than a demo too, it's a bunch of completely new missions not found in the retail release, revealing a little more about the Orcs and of course offering heaps of tasty battles to indulge in. It even works on Battle.net

But that's not all! Cast your eye over the following pages and revel in the remarkable lineup that is the CDs and DVD for PCPP#83. It's one of the best disc outings yet: enjoy!

Paul Noone
cdgod@next.com.au

FREE GAME!

It's the RTS classic! Hitler has been temporally erased by Einstein's new Chronosphere technology, and now Stalin is poised to conquer the Free West! Take command of some familiar units from the original Command & Conquer as well as many new weapons including V2 Rocket Trucks, Tesla Coils, MiG Fighters, the Iron Curtain invulnerability device and much more! Sea, air and land units come together in one of the most perfectly designed RTS games of yesteryear.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

Red Alert is a free game that takes up the whole of CD1 and is presented as a .iso image on the DVD. If you are a CD-user you must have CD1 in your drive when you wish to play the game. DVD users must use an .iso mounting program available online. Red Alert will work fine on all Windows95, Windows98 and WindowsMe machines. It may not run on NT4 or Win2000 machines, but it depends on the configuration.

RED ALERT: ALLIED DISC

NOTE TO XP USERS: Windows XP is a highly advanced operating system far in advance of what Red Alert was written for. To install Red Alert successfully under Windows XP, you must right-click the autorun.sys file on the CD, select PROPERTIES and run in Windows95 compatibility mode. Unfortunately, this fix is not successful for all XP users, so PC PowerPlay is unable to guarantee that Red Alert will work at all under Windows XP. XP users should only purchase this magazine if they understand that Red Alert may not work for them and that there may not be any fix available. Visit www.westwood.com for further information.



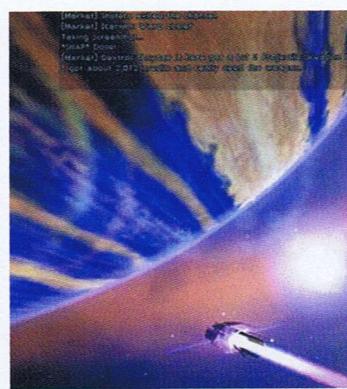
DVD ONLY!

Earth & Beyond is the first massively-multiplayer online role-playing galaxy. Thousands of players come together online to live the lives of legendary science-fiction heroes. As the captain of a powerful starship, you will carve out your destiny in this unique space-based universe. Aside from combat, you can also advance in the game through exploration or trading. Whether you prefer to explore the mysteries of the universe, become the most powerful warrior in the universe, or buy low and sell high as a shrewd trader, Earth & Beyond offers all those possibilities.

NOTE: The demo will stop working five days after you start playing. The five days are calendar days, not gametime days. If you only play for the first minute, the demo still expires five days later. You will be playing on the regular

EARTH & BEYOND

servers and have access to the same game features as players with the retail version. If you never install and register, then the demo will not expire. It will remain usable for the entire life of Earth & Beyond. A valid credit card is required for verification only - you will not be charged. Demo version players, after five days of play, will have to purchase the retail version of the game, or an Earth & Beyond Buddy Registration Code from the EA Online Store, to continue playing. You will be able to keep the in-game characters and starships created while playing the demo.



Requires:

- P3-500**
- 128MB RAM**
- 32MB Videocard**
- 1.5GB HDD & Internet Connection**

WARCRAFT 3

Slap a Greenskin for me!

Blizzard introduces a new concept in gaming: the RPS (Role-Playing Strategy) game. A strategy game set heavily within a role-playing environment, RPS takes the individual combat and interactive environments found in role-playing games and combines them within a competitive strategic environment. Warcraft 3 puts players in command of smaller, potent parties of heroes and troops. They



adventure and do battle in a dynamic world of living towns, wandering monsters, characters and quests, while simultaneously devising strategies to defeat their enemies. Play through an untold chapter in the Warcraft 3 saga. This three mission demo is the chronicle of the Orcs' journey from Lordaeron to Kalimdor. The demo features three NEW singleplayer missions and three NEW multiplayer maps.

Requires:
P2-400
128MB RAM
8MB Videocard
200MB HDD

NEVERWINTER NIGHTS

Roll to see if I get drunk!

Start your training at the academy as a deadly and dangerous rogue moving through the shadows using stealth and secrecy, or as a scholarly Wizard wielding powerful magic against your enemies. Perhaps a hulking Barbarian whose lust for battle is matched only by his terrible rage is more your style, or the classic armour-clad Paladin who protects the innocent and vanquishes his foes. Once your training is complete, do battle with ugly skulking Goblins and undead Skeletons. This demo allows you to play through the Prelude of the singleplayer campaign.

Requires:
P3-450
128MB RAM
16MB Videocard
1.2GB HDD



MECHWARRIOR 4: MERCENARIES

Pay up or I'll stomp you!

Control 100-tonne mechs while leading up to eight hired guns into the heat of battle in the quest for the allmighty C-Bill in MechWarrior 4: Mercenaries, the latest stand-alone instalment of the critically-acclaimed MechWarrior action-simulator franchise. And this time around, honour doesn't even enter into the equation - it's all about the money. With more than 35 'Mechs, new weapons, and new electronic packages available for purchase, chances are you'll need every C-Bill you earn.

Requires:
P4-600
128MB RAM
32MB Videocard
300MB HDD

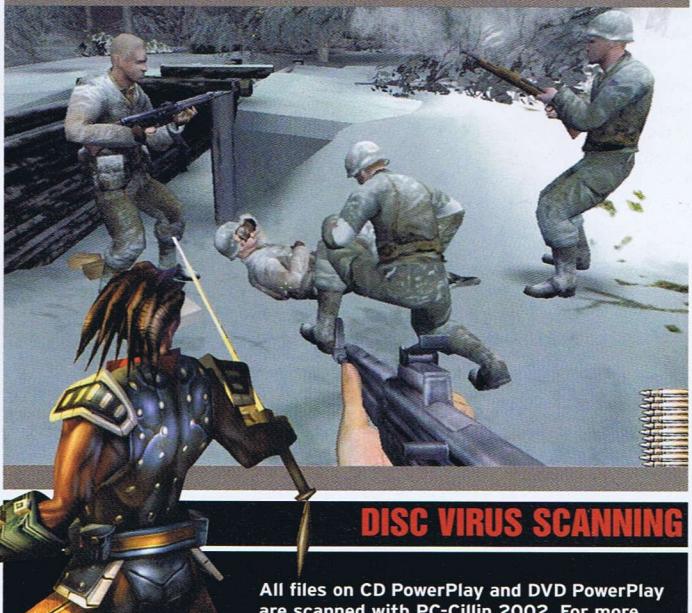


DVD ONLY! MEDAL OF HONOR: SPEARHEAD

Shoot him in the bulge!

This is a multiplayer demo for the upcoming expansion pack to Medal of Honor: Allied Assault. The MOHAA Spearhead demo will engage up to 32 players in fierce combat on two different maps: Malta and Druckkammer. Experience the innovative new objective-based multiplayer Tug of War mode, as well as a host of new weapons and soldiers for both Axis and Allied forces. The v2.11 demo patch fixes a server crash bug.

Requires
P3-450
128 MB RAM
16MB Videocard
250MB HDD



DISC VIRUS SCANNING

All files on CD PowerPlay and DVD PowerPlay are scanned with PC-Cillin 2002. For more information please visit: www.manac.com.au/VirusCheck





Yellow Boots

I wrote this after my house burnt down.

Okay, so technically speaking it wasn't actually my house, it was a house that my crazy ex-third flatmate and I found as we were walking the deserted backstreets of Emu Heights west of Penrith, NSW. It's kind of this thing we do every year during bushfire season, once the bushfire brigade evacuates people from their homes, my crazy ex-third flatmate and I head out to the mountains, getting off the train close enough to the fire front to find an evacuated suburb, but not close enough to get burned to a crisp. We find a nice looking house, break in, and enjoy Christmas. If we're really clever, we pick a house that's going to get burned down anyway, so we can enjoy the wine cellar, the ham in the fridge, the turkey cold-cuts in the freezer and the presents under the tree.

Okay, so it's morally reprehensible and even, according to my psychiatrist, disgusting but he's still a second year med student so what would he know? We give a little bit back in any case, because my crazy ex-third flatmate and I always invite a struggling game developer up to the house for a bit of Christmas cheer and a break from the punishing schedule of finishing their grotty little game in time for the big sales of January.

So it was that for Christmas 2002 my crazy ex-third flatmate and I had found a nice house in Emu Heights, had set it up with a bathtub full of equal parts ice and stubbies of VB, and put out the call to Dog Breath Interactive, a young - a very young - startup from Homebush.

These guys, there were three of them as it turned out, had dropped out of year 10 to develop games and had so far produced a stunningly accurate remake of solitaire that was so stunningly accurate it was in fact impossible to tell it apart from the original solitaire, right down to the Copyright Microsoft 1985-2002 line in the About box. Other people, would have pooh-poohed Dog Breath for this kind of business strategy but not me. Because I knew that Dog Breath was now working on something very special. Something very special indeed.

"Welcome!" I said to the three boys as they stepped over the threshold and over the unconscious form of my crazy ex-third flatmate where he had slumped in the entrance to the lounge after unwisely trying to hook up his badly-chipped PSX to the 80cm Sony Trinitron TV that belonged presumably to whoever it was who actually owned this house.

"Wow," said lead programmer Craig Gout, "you've got a cool house. Where's the toilet?"

"I think it's down there," I replied.

"You think it's down there?" said Jason Tinea, the 3D-modeller, "What, you don't know where your own toilet is?"

"I normally just piss in the sink," I replied easily. There was one of those awkward silences. "You know?" I attempted, "Just like everyone else? Guys?"

"Do you have any beer?" asked the third member of the little team, Joel Ulceration. His exact role at Dogs Breath had not been made clear to me, but I presumed he was the cousin of one of the other guys, or something like that. He was nervously flicking a zippo lighter on and off with a cool little one-handed gesture, because he was like, nervous or something, I guess. In any case, it gave me a welcome opportunity to run to the bathroom, beat my head on the wall a couple of times for being so gauche as to admit to pissing in the sink, grab five beers and return.

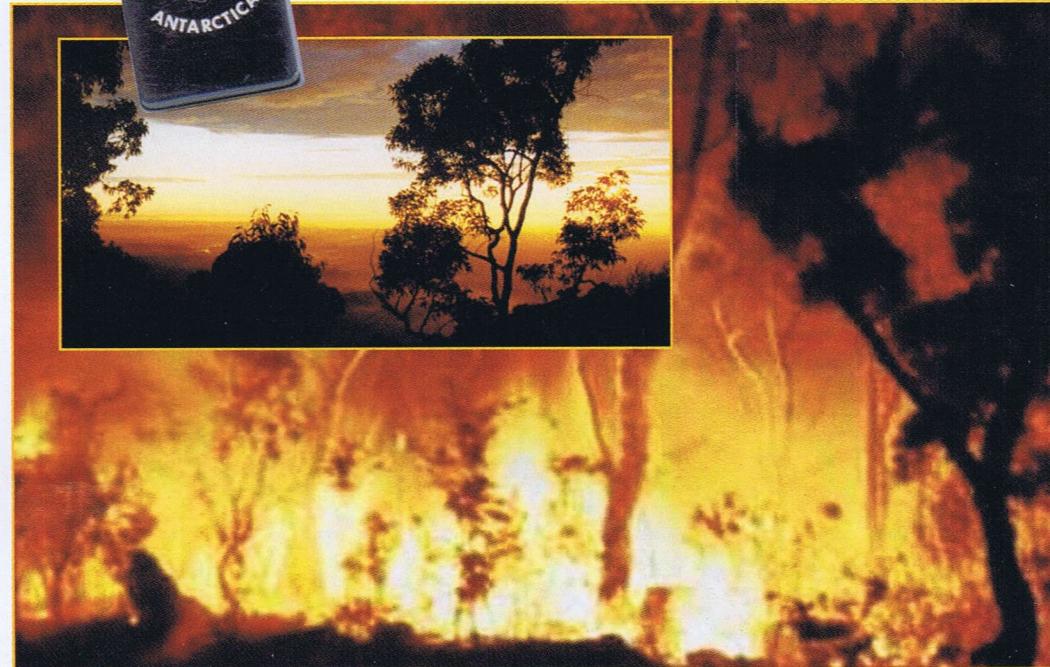
When I got back the house was on fire.

I looked out the back window, but the bushfire itself hadn't moved, in fact it looked like the backburn had been effective for once and the front was actually moving away from the house. Perhaps a cinder had fallen on the roof and got up under the guttering? Perhaps, but since it was the



ARSON SQUAD 3D

Never trust a man with a zippo



expensive-looking Italian leather lounge that sat in front of the 80cm Sony Trinitron TV that was on fire, probably not. No one was mentioning the blaze, so in an attempt to avoid another social faux pas I didn't either.

Passing out the beers, I asked Dog Breath how their latest game was going, the so called secret project.

"Well," said Craig, as if forgetting his earlier awkwardness, "Try and imagine a game of skill, where a grid is laid out before the player and they must pick their way through the grid attempting to 'flag' a certain number of 'mines' and then 'sweep' these 'mines' away to clear the level."

"Like minesweeper?" I asked. As the flames leapt higher, I uncapped my crazy ex-third flatmate's beer and poured it all over his clothing to extinguish the few burning embers that had settled there. Then I sort of pushed him a little further from the burning couch with my foot. It was then that I noticed the Perspex baby grand piano in the corner was now also on fire. I had to admit it: whoever was the arsonist was certainly good.

"I suppose," said Jason, "it does sound a little like minesweeper. But this is a new concept. We're accurately and truly REMAKING minesweeper for a new generation."

"Oh Goddamnit!" screamed Craig suddenly, "Who are we kidding? We'll never come up with an original concept, never! This company is a pile of crap!"

The crystal chandelier that dangled from the dining room ceiling with a particularly tasteless air suddenly burst into flames.

"Now look here," I said, as I rolled my crazy ex-third flatmate toward the door, "there's no need to get all depressed. You just need to develop a game about something you're passionate about. Do any of you have any passions?"

Craig grumbled something that sounded suspiciously like "minesweeper". Jason just grumbled, and the other kid, Joel, just flicked his zippo on and off a couple more times. I continued rolling my crazy ex-third flatmate out onto the porch, and Dog Breath followed.

"Well take Joel here," I said as I rode my crazy ex-third flatmate down the front lawn like a kind of beer-soaked sledge, and the main supporting beams in the house collapsed,

bringing the whole structure down in on itself with a deafening crashing and snapping sound. "Why don't you ask him about his passions? I'm sure he can come up with something."

Joel just flicked his zippo lighter and scowled. Craig and Jason looked at him.

"Who are you?" said Craig.

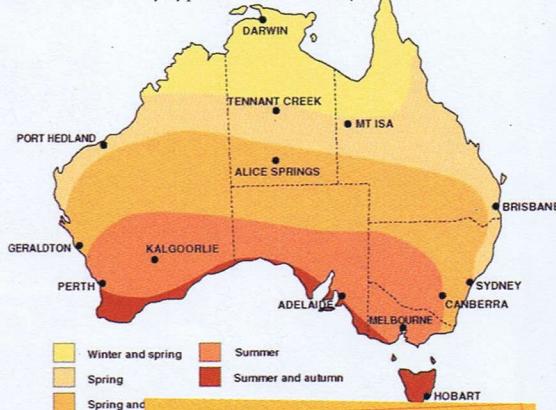
I blinked. "You mean he...?" I asked, "He never...? I mean you...?" Craig lifted a pointed finger toward Joel, whereupon it caught fire. I hadn't even seen the kid move.

So with that, I wished them all good luck in their future endeavours, hoisted my crazy ex-third flatmate onto my shoulders and began the long walk to Emu Plains railway station. All in all it



FIRE SEASONS

had been a fairly typical Christmas day.



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HEATSINK FANS



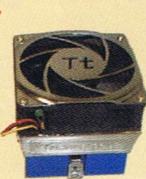
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GEFORCE4 COPPER COOLER
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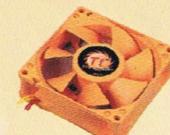


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HardCan0 5 Hard
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LCD Temp. Monitor
with Fan Speed
Setting Controller



CASE FANS

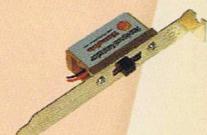
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